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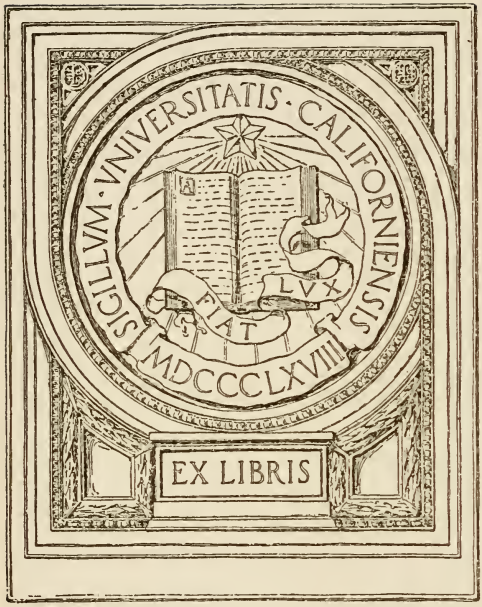
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WHEN THE NORMAN CAME

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WHEN THE NORMAN CAME

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

MICHAEL O'HANRAHAN

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WHEN THE NORMAN CAME

CHAPTER I

THE HOSTING INTO HY KINSELLA

The sun was glittering from the points of a forest of spears. Bravely the morning breeze fluttered the banners and bannerettes of a numerous host which in serried order advanced steadily towards the town which lay in the distance. From the northward they had come, these men of Breifne, and Meath, and Dublin, to try conclusions with the king over whose territory their feet trod. In the ranks of that host were intermingled the tall Breifnian, fresh from his home beside Loch Reamhair, with many a bold mountaineer from out the woods and fastnesses of Wicklow. Cuala and Fine Gall had sent forth their clansmen, while behind the raven banner of their chief, Hasculf MacTorcaill, marched the Ostmen of Dublin, side by side with many a brave kern from the plains of Hy Kinsella.

At the head of this goodly host rode a gallant warrior, proud and stately. Raven-black were the ringletted locks which fell down on his shoulders from beneath his crested helmet, inlaid with gold. Of red gold was the brooch which fastened his mantle. At his side hung from an embroidered belt a long, straight sword, its bronze scabbard beautifully chased, its hilt of whitest ivory. Close behind rode a giolla bearing his prince's shield and spears. Even without glancing at the cognizance worked on his banner, we could have easily recognized this chief, whose glance roved over the surrounding country. He was none other than the one-eyed prince of Breifne, Tiernan O Ruairc.

From his Breifnian home he had hosted forth with septs and princelings to strike down the tyrant, Diarmuid MacMurrough, who with fire and sword had harried and driven to desperation the people over whom he ruled. At this time the newly-elected Ard-ri, Rory O'Connor, was making his royal circuit through the land. Everywhere he had been received with respect. The territorial princes had delivered to him the hostages which were the pledges of their allegiance. In the course of his progress he had approached the borders of Hy Kinsella. But here no kiss of peace awaited him. On the contrary, the king, Diarmuid, who bore him no love, had set the torch to his royal city of Fearna, and with a few of his people fled to seek a refuge from the vengeance of his over-lord amidst the gleanns of Wicklow. Not wishing to turn aside just at the moment, O'Connor had proceeded on his way. He would return later to deal with the rebellious monarch. But a swift Nemesis followed on the track of Diarmuid. In the past his hand had been against every man. Now he was to have every man's hand turned against him. At the news of his defection, the chiefs had flown to arms and hastened to the aid of the Ard-ri. Hence the hosting of the Northerns.

The chief, O'Ruairc, caused the halt to be sounded. But it was evident that no lengthened stay was to be made, for no puballs for the chiefs were set up. Neither did the men busy themselves with the raising of their huts or booths. No, it seemed to be merely a halt by the way—a wait for the happening of some expected event. The clansmen chatted amongst themselves. The leaders of the different contingents gathered round O'Ruairc, who gazed long and earnestly into the yellow morning mist. A short consultation took place between the chiefs. Then scouts, both mounted and on foot, were dispatched to scour the surrounding country. Within the hour a mounted scout came dashing up to the prince. He was accompanied by a strange horse-

man, evidently the bearer of some important tidings. Whatever they were they caused an instant dispersal of the chiefs, who hastily proceeded to take up their positions with their troops. Again the trumpets blared forth, and the interrupted march was once again resumed.

Suddenly, away on the right, wheeled into view a large force, issuing from out the thick woods which had hidden it from sight. In the midst of this cohort we behold the chief, who by the aid of the strong right arms of his warriors rules the destinies of the kingdom of Ireland. He, Rory O'Connor, King of Connacht, and High King of Eireann is the moving spirit of all this grand array. Red gold were the ringlets which swept his shoulders. Golden the helmet which crowned his head. His mantle of bright crimson was worked in gold and precious stones. In his hand he grasped a spear, its socket of pure gold. In truth he looked every inch a king, seated there in his chariot, his clansmen and liegemen round him.

Rapidly the two bodies approached each other. Dismounting from his horse, O'Ruairc advanced on foot to meet the Ard-ri. The king, on his part, descended from his chariot. There, in the presence of the two armies, O'Ruairc of Breifne bent the knee to his over-lord, who embraced him, and imprinted on his cheek the kiss of peace. No sooner was this ceremony over than, after a short conference between O'Ruairc and O'Connor, a herald, seated in a chariot, was sent forward to summon to his allegiance MacMurrough, whose town of Fearna lay before them. In his hands he bore the white wand and naked sword which signified to all beholders that his master came armed either with the kiss of peace or the brand of war.

Arrived in the square before the castle of MacMurrough, which now only lifted up its blackened walls towards the blue sky, the trumpeter who

accompanied the herald, blew three shrill blasts on his trumpet. Hardly had the echoes died away than an old monk came walking slowly towards them. He came from the Abbey of St. Mary, whose walls the fugitive king spared.

"Whence come ye, and whom do ye seek?" demanded the monk, halting before the herald.

And the king's herald replied: "We seek Diarmuid, son of Murrough, lord of this land of Hy Kinsella, and we come in the name of the noble O'Connor, Ard-ri of Eireann, whose herald I am."

"Go!" cried the monk. "Go tell your king that Diarmuid, the lord of Hy Kinsella, has gone hence. A week ago he fled, none know whither. O Herald of the King, can you not mark the ruins which he has left behind him," and he pointed with outstretched arm to the charred and blackened remains of dwellings, whose walls of wood had fallen an easy prey to the destroying flames.

Mournfully the royal herald gazed on the scene of devastation. He would have spoken further with the monk, but when he turned he saw only his disappearing form. Bending then to the charioteer he bade him drive back to the place where the king waited. To the Ard-ri and the other chiefs he related all he had seen and heard.

"O noble king!" he cried, "I have gone to yonder city to summon your liegeman Diarmuid to his obedience. But what a sight greeted mine eyes. Only blackened ruins meet the gaze. The dwellings of his people have fed the flames kindled by MacMurrough, who a week agone fled from his burning city, none knew whither."

For an instant a stupefied silence gripped the chiefs. Then a wild shout of "Forward! Vengeance on the traitor!" rang out. The trumpets blared out again, and the united forces swept on towards MacMurrough's deserted capital. A couple of hundred rods distant

from the ruined city the ranks were broken, and swiftly the clansmen proceeded to the task of making the encampment for the night.

. . . . .

The sun had risen to a new day. Higher and higher it mounted up and up and up into the blue sky, casting its golden gleams on spear point and battle-axe, kissing with its rays the softly-waving banners and pennons which floated before the tents of the tribal chiefs, awaking from deep slumber the clansmen who lie neath the booths and tents which dotted the plain.

Hardly had the day-god started on his fiery course than a loud trumpet-blast shrilled through the morning air, and across the plain came riding the herald of the High King. He came from the royal puball, which had been erected on a gently-rising eminence. Before it waved the royal standard with its crowned lion rampant. Thick as a man's body, tall as a warrior's spear, was the huge king-candle which stood in front of the door. Grouped round were the clansmen, whose duty it was to watch over the safety of the Ard-ri. Some of them wore high, conical baireads, with the ionar and kilt, while their shins were protected by greaves of brass. Across their shoulders were thrown the terrible battle-axe, and from their belts depended a short sgian. Others again were clad in the tight-fitting triubhas and ionar, and were armed with long, straight swords and spears. But one thing was common to all, the graceful mantle which floated round them. Varied were the colours of these mantles, some blue, some crimson, some yellow. Daring would be the man who would endeavour to break through that grim cordon of fighters who bore on their bodies the scars of many a wound received in hosting or border-foray. Daring indeed he would be, and foolish to madness.

Slowly the herald proceeded on his way. He sum-

moned the chiefs and princes to take council with the Ard-ri. The king required the presence of all. For the coming council will be a fateful one, in which must be decided the punishment to be meted out to the disturber who has defied the Ard-ri's authority.

In ones and twos and threes the princes made their way to the Abbey of St. Mary, where the council was to be held. O'Connor, the Ard-ri, had already arrived, and taken his seat. Then three blasts of the trumpets announced that the king was waiting, that the doors had been thrown open. In single file the nobles entered and took their places, each man taking the seat against which his shield had been placed by the king's marshal. To the council chamber they have come, each one in warlike trim, armed with sword or battle-axe. No ordinary occasion this, where surrounded by the arts of peace they had come together to proclaim a prince. No, in all the rude panoply of war they were come, but no sword would be bared in anger on that day. They were armed only against injustice.

The assembly was still standing. Forth stepped the herald, and in a loud voice proclaimed the king's peace. Then, at a trumpet call, the chiefs seated themselves, and the council opened.

At the head of the lofty hall, on a raised seat, sat O'Connor, the Ard-ri, a golden torque round his neck. From the golden girdle which encircled his waist depended his heavy broadsword with its hilt of red native gold. On his arms were heavy bands of the same precious metal. Of brightest, richest, crimson silk, brought from the land of Gaul, was the mantle which fell gracefully from his shoulders. Against the chair rested his buckler of hammered bronze. A gallant and imposing figure truly, this king who presided over that assemblage of the men of Leinster and Connacht.

Around the chair of the Ard-ri stood grouped four bare-headed, fierce-looking clansmen, their battle-axes gripped in ther right hands, their bucklers on their arms.

When the royal herald had announced that the purpose for which the council had assembled was to deliberate on the acts and flight of the king, Diarmuid MacMurrough, up rose Donagh MacGiolla Patrick, Prince of Ossory.

"O High King of Eireann!" he exclaimed, "we have marched hither with our forces to punish the treason and tyrannies of this king, who in his vaunting pride and insolence has dared to defy the will of the princes. On every side we have seen the results of his tyranny and turbulence. Here before our eyes the proofs of his violence and rebellion are spread out. To your side, O king, have flocked the nobles and chiefs of the territory of the traitor, MacMurrough, to prove to you that they are tired of the acts of this man, who seems to revel in deeds of blood and violence, to show to you that he is a man apart. And as if this were not enough, as if to further prove his guilt, he has fled his kingdom, preferring to seek safety in flight from the outraged feelings of his subjects, than to defend his actions, and trust to the justice of the assembly of the men of Eireann. Therefore I, MacGiolla Patrick, King of Ossory, demand that, according to the ancient law of our nation, which declares that an unworthy chief can be degraded, our assembly proceed to the deposition of MacMurrough, King of Leinster, and the Danes in this kingdom."

A murmur of conversation greeted these bold words. But no voice was raised on behalf of the fugitive. Indeed, no one seemed to have anything to urge against his deposition. At last a chief stood up and addressed the High King. He was no other than O'Ruairc of Breifne.

"O king," he exclaimed, "MacGiolla Patrick has spoken well. But to the lords and chieftains of the Kingdom of Leinster belong the right of decision. Let them speak."

In answer to his challenge a grey-haired chief, O'Riain of Idrone, rose up.

"We, the princes and chiefs of the septs of the Kingdom of Leinster, have discussed this affair, O High King of Eireann. It is our opinion that MacMurrough, our over-king, must be deposed. It grieves me that no other course is open to us, but the well-being and safety of our people demand the setting aside of this turbulent man."

Murmurs of approbation greeted the old noble's words, and at a sign from the Ard-ri, the herald called out in a voice which rang through the hall:

"Let MacMurrough, King of Leinster and of the Danes of this kingdom, come forward."

But there was no answer to his summons. Instead, an old monk (he who had spoken the previous day with the herald in front of the palace), who had been admitted by the doorkeeper, advanced up the hall and addressed the High King.

"I would speak, noble king," he said.

"Can you tell us aught of the king, MacMurrough?" inquired the Ard-ri.

"More than any man in this noble assembly," replied the monk.

"Speak then," said O'Connor. "We await your tidings."

"Noble Ard-ri," said the monk, "it is useless for you to call on MacMurrough. Two nights agone he fled across the sea to the land of England."

"How know you this, O cleric?" demanded the Ard-ri.

"From the lips of a messenger who beheld the flight of MacMurrough from the inlet of Corcrain yonder in Imokilly."

"We thank you for the tidings you bring," said O'Connor. When the monk had withdrawn he turned to the assembly.

"Lords and chiefs of the septs of Connacht and Meath, and you also my liegemen of Leinster and Dublin, you have heard the tidings which this cleric has brought. You have seen how this recreant prince has defied the

authority which I hold from you. You have heard how he has fled beyond the seas to escape the just judgment which would have been apportioned to him. We have summoned him to our presence, but his flight has been proved. You have discussed the matter amongst yourselves. Have you reached a decision?"

He paused. Instantly the chiefs rose up, and a shout of "We have decided; let MacMurrough be deposed," shook the Abbey walls.

"Then by the power which you, lords and chiefs of Leinster, Connacht, and Meath, have delegated to me, I, O'Connor, King of Connacht, Ard-ri of Eireann, declare the fugitive to be no longer king and this land absolved from all allegiance to him. Henceforth let no man give him shelter or assistance. By his acts of tyranny and rebellion he has forfeited all right to power. In accordance with our ancient laws I deprive him of all legal power. . . . And that no man in this Kingdom of Leinster may be without a chief to defend him, let us proceed to the election of a new king. Our ancient customs teach us that it is the right and privilege of each country in this nation to have a chieftain to protect it, who will be its guide in peace, its defender in war. Let a chief for this land of Leinster be chosen."

But little discussion on this point was necessary. With one voice the nobles declared that the kingdom of the deposed monarch should be bestowed on his brother Murrough, who was accordingly declared elected. With little delay the inauguration of the new king was carried out, and duly invested with the white, straight wand of authority he was set up to rule in the place of the man who had been ruler of the broad, rich lands of Leinster, but who by the violence of his passions had turned the love and respect of his people into fear and hate.

To England Diarmuid had gone, but for what purpose none knew, none cared. No one troubled about the fallen man. No one breathed his name aloud. Mayhap

a few faithful hearts, who loved the tyrant in spite of his faults, waited and watched. But they kept their own counsel. The forces of O'Connor marched away from Fearna, and in the palace of Leinster a new MacMurrough reigned.

Thus was accomplished the work which was to have such consequences for the Kingdom of Ireland, consequences the participators in the assembly of that August day could hardly have foreseen, even in their wildest imaginings.

CHAPTER II

THE FAIR OF TAILLTEAN—CLAN MacMURROUGH

The fair of Tailltean was in full swing. Thither the people had flocked in multitudes from every corner of the land. From the gleanns of Antrim and Donegal they had come, from the western shores, washed by the waves of the wild Atlantic. With the crowds of gaily-dressed Gaedhils mingled many a man of the outland races. For this fair of Tailltean was famed in all those continental lands where the feet of the wandering Gaedheal had led him. Greeks and Franks, Scots and Spaniards, jostled their way through the groups of sweet-mouthed Connactians, affable Lagenians, or proud Ultonians. Here they had come to buy those products of Eireann, the fame of which had spread beyond the seas. On every side booths and marts had been set up. Here the Gaulish merchant displayed his wines. There swarthy Moors from the Spanish land had spread out their richly-ornamented saddles and horse trappings, beside the meads of some trader from the Muskerrys of Munster. Across the white-capped wave had travelled the citizen of Nantes, with his ornaments of gold and silver, his garments of silk and precious stuffs. Florentines and merchants of Lucca were examining the rich serges and many-coloured mantles displayed by the native makers, or fingering the native black wool which required no dye.

In the animal enclosure horse-boys were leading noble colts brought from the Connemara hills, fiery French steeds reared and plunged, while the Welsh dealer had crossed the Sea of Man, bringing with him

his trusty British geldings to exchange for the linen and foodstuffs of the Irish land. In booths built of white wattles the native artificers had hung the finest products of their forges and stone-moulds. Here was the heavy broadsword, well-tempered and beautifully wrought. Rows on rows of tall spears attracted the attention of the martially inclined. Bucklers and battle-axes were there. Potters and glass-workers from the Wicklow gleanns showed the choicest specimens of their arts in earthenware and glass worked in enamels. Men who practised the builder's art showed their house-building materials fashioned from the "chieftain" materials, oak (such oak as the English King William Rufus, had imported into his city of London to roof his new Hall at Westminster), hazel and holly.

On every side the sound of music was heard. Round harpers and pipe-players the music-loving people were congregated. Bone-men and castanet-players competed with one another for patronage. But over all rang out the raucous voices of fantastically-dressed clowns and gleemen, who by their rude jests and pointed quips, drew shouts of laughter from the bystanders. Balanced erect on the backs of galloping horses, equestrians claimed the plaudits and rewards of cheering onlookers.

Here is a group of jugglers. The chief juggler is a tall, bald-headed man, dressed in a speckled white cloak. In his ears he wears gold ear-rings, on his bare arms broad bands of brass. He is supplied with nine short swords, nine small shields, and nine golden balls. Lifting the swords in his right hand he throws them, one by one, far up over his head, and as they descend grasps them in his left, thus keeping them whirling round his head a constant glittering circle of steel.

The voice of a clown strikes on the ears of the pleasure-seekers. His hair is cut to a point and rises up horn-like on his head; his face, painted a bluish-

black like a negro's, make his eyes appear as if they were all white. His parti-coloured cloak is fastened with a brass brooch, and at his side hangs a little bell which he strikes, every now and again with a wand of bronze, to call attention. In a high-pitched, squeaky voice he chants a refrain:

> "Come listen to my lay,
> Come listen to my lay,
> From Scotia's land I've strayed away,
> With jokes for every day."

And many do go to listen to his lays, and laugh at his jokes.

It is still early. By and by the crowds of merry-makers will have deserted these merry-andrews for the more exciting spectacles of spear-throwing, sword combats, and chariot racing. Indeed at that moment the blare of trumpets announces that the games, whereat the Ard-ri himself is to preside, and where the warriors and sons of nobles are to compete, are about to begin. In a few minutes the stand of juggler and jester is deserted. Buying and selling is forgotten, and away towards the green of contests the people stream to feast their eyes on those warlike amusements which were ever the delight of the warlike Gaedheal.

On a raised platform, arched over and approached by six steps, sits the Ard-ri, Rory O'Connor. His chair, beautifully carved, is covered with cloth of gold. Round him are grouped the lords and chiefs of territories dressed in their brightest and richest apparel. In the midst of the group stands Murrough, the reigning monarch of Leinster. By his side stands a noble youth, tall and slender. Fair curling hair falls in ringlets down on his shoulders. This youth, or boy we should say, for he is but sixteen, is the only son of the now king of Leinster. He is dressed in ionar of scarlet cloth, while his tight-fitting triubhas is of blue. At his side hangs a short sword from a belt of most exquisite make. In his hand he grasps a spear, its

shaft decorated with animals of gold. His cloak is of blue silk, embroidered in silver. Indeed a gallant-looking youth he is, standing there amidst the nobles of Eireann.

A fanfare of trumpets announces that the contests are about to commence. Forth on the green step two warriors, armed, one with his long broadsword, his buckler on his arm; the other with his battle-axe gripped in his right hand. They fight with blunted weapons. At a sign from the marshal the combat begins. Backwards and forwards sway the champions, to right and left. Sharply ring the blows of sword or battle-axe on the shields. Springing now this way, now that, the fighters avoid each other's blows. But suddenly the swordsman springs nimbly aside. Taken by surprise he of the battle-axe steps back, his body uncovered for an instant. It is only an instant, but in that instant the other has seized his advantage. Leaping forward he places his sword to the breast of his antagonist, and demands the judgment of the umpire. A shout from the spectators announces that the bout has been won, and to the swordsman the umpire awards the victory.

Many other contests of various kinds follow, feats of horsemanship, chariot racing, mimic warfare, then the green is cleared for the contest which of all others has aroused the keenest interest. This was the contest for the king's prize. A condition attaching to the winning of it was that if the winner had not been already knighted he should be invested, and receive the honour of knighthood at the hands of the king in the presence of the whole people.

For the prize the competition was therefore keen, and the competitors many. At a sign from the High King a herald rode out into the centre of the green, and the trumpeters having blown their trumpets, he announced the terms of the contest. "Our noble king," he proclaimed, "O'Connor, King of Connacht and High King of Eireann, offers for competition amongst the

youths of Eireann, a noble sword tempered in the forge of Conn, the noble king's chief smith, and a buckler of hammered bronze. The king will proclaim the victorious youth, splintering the greatest number of spears, knight in valour and prowess, and will invest him with the arms he has won, here in the presence of his assembled people. But two nobles must be prepared to stand sponsors for his courage and manly attainments. Let the contestants come forward."

Quickly the contestants took their places at one end of the green. Then the High King descended from the pavilion that he might the more closely watch the strivings of the youthful competitors. At the other end of the green was erected a shield, tough and highly tempered. At this shield each one of the youths must cast a number of spears. To him who splintered the greatest number would the victory be awarded..

The contest was long and keen. The tough bronze of the shield had been dented and battered in many places. Strewn at its base was a heap of spears whose points had been shivered on its surface by the boy champions. But at last only two of the youths remained, Cian MacMurrough and a youth, son of the Dalriadan chief, O'Hara. Between them the final test lay. To each of them the king handed a spear, heavy and well-tempered as the cleitine of Cuchulainn.

Poising himself for an instant on the ball of his foot Cian raises his spear. An instant he pauses taking aim. Then straight and unerring, as an arrow from the bow, it flew through the air, and striking the shield with tremendous force crashed to the ground, its point splintered to atoms. A shout of acclamation pealed to the skies. Cries of "MacMurrough, the victor!" rang out.

But no. Victory was not his. Forward stepped the young Dalriadan, his spear poised. Like a flash of lightning seemed his weapom as it leaped forward, and shivered itself against the shield.

"A cast worthy of the great Cet himself," remarked the Ard-ri to Donagh of Ossory who stood behind him.

"A better I have not seen for many a day," replied the Ossorian.

And then O'Connor handed a spear, heavier and more highly-tempered than any he had yet had, to Cian. Again he poised and launched the weapon. Like to a thunderbolt driven from forth the black clouds it seemed as it whizzed on its way. With a crash, which echoed and re-echoed from the hills around, it struck the shield fair in the centre. Riven and split with the force of that giant-like blow, shield and broken spear fell clanging to the ground.

The air was rent asunder with the roar of acclamation which greeted the feat. Cries of "MacMurrough Abu! Champion of the contest! Let him be proclaimed!" were heard on every side.

And indeed no further trial was necessary. No knight or warrior there would have equalled the cast.

Striding to Cian's side the young Dalriadan grasped his hand. "Well have you deserved the prize," he exclaimed. "No warrior in Eireann would have equalled that effort."

"Sore is my regret to have won from such a noble youth as you," said Cian, embracing him warmly.

They had not time for further words, for the marshal beckoned Cian forward to the king's presence.

"Brave youth," said O'Connor, "nobly have you won the prize with which I will now invest you."

The marshal having removed Cian's own sword, the king taking from the marshal's hands a beautiful sword with hilt of ivory, hung it to the belt which encircled Cian's waist. Placing a buckler of red bronze on his left arm he addressed him in the following terms:

"Cian, son of Murrough, with these arms I invest thee. Right bravely have you won them."

Then turning to the nobles surrounding him he

demanded: "Who stands sponsor-in-arms to this young hero?"

"I, MacGiolla Patrick," replied the chief of Ossory, stepping forward.

"And I, Maghnus O'Riain," spoke up the grey-haired chief of Idrone.

"What know ye of this youth?" again demanded the king. "Think ye that he is fitted to receive the honour of knighthood?"

"None more fitted," replied the two chiefs. "Willingly we stand sponsors for him, believing that he will never cause us shame."

The king turned again to Cian.

"Therefore, I, O'Connor, King of Connacht and High King of Eireann, name thee true knight and champion. Ever be your sword at the service of the weak and helpless. Defend the honour of womankind, console the wretched. Be generous to the poor. Be you ever the upholder of right and justice. Let no deed of shame sully your arms. May your honour always shine pure and unstained, an ornament to the true knighthood of Eireann, an adornment to the noble name you bear."

When he had done, O'Connor embraced the young knight, kissing him thrice. A fanfare of trumpets rang out, and the nobles passed in procession before Cian and his two sponsors, their bared weapons lowered in salute. The cheers of the people filled the air. No ceremony of the great fair of Tailltean had been more popular than the knighting, no victory more pleasing than that of Cian MacMurrough.

CHAPTER III

IN THE PALACE AT FEARNA—DIARMUID

It is night. Several days have elapsed since the events related in our last chapter. The banqueting hall of the king's palace at Fearna is ablaze with the light of myriad candles which hang from the roof in magnificent candelabra. As they burn they give forth a pleasant odour which permeates the air. Along the walls are suspended the shields of the chiefs who have come to partake of the hospitality of the Lagenian monarch.

Murrough, a tall man of rather careworn aspect, his long black hair and beard dashed with grey, presides at the feast. Above his head burns a mighty king-candle. Round the long, low tables sat or reclined on couches the chiefs, and warriors, and learned men, each in his proper place in order of priority. As the wine, and mead, and ale began to circulate in drinking horns ornamented in gold and silver, the hum of conversation grew louder.

"By my knightly word," quoth MacGiolla Patrick, turning to his neighbour, O'Riain of Idrone, "'tis many a cup of goodly mead I have quaffed in this hall when Diarmuid Mor sat at the head of the table."

"Aye, I doubt it not," replied the grey-bearded chief, "I doubt it not. I grant you he was a generous, feast-loving chief spite of all his turbulent ways. But since his fall I have heard little concerning him."

"Nor have I," said the Ossorian. "There be some who tell that he abode for many months in the house of one Robert Harding, yonder in the town of Bristol."

"Aye, so they say," chimed in yellow-bearded

MacTorcaill, the Danish chief of Dublin. "But not a month agone I conversed with a merchant in Nantes in the country of the Bretons, who declared he had seen him in Aquitaine, a fief of the crown of England."

"Strange, very strange," mused he of Idrone. "And to think that only two years ago this man, who is now fallen so low, was the ruler of us all."

"Heard ye the story which the horsedealer from the Welsh marches related to Brian O'Toole of Imail?" queried another.

"No," cried the others in chorus.

"He related to Brian that while engaged in the purchase of horses near to St. David's, in South Wales, he had heard tidings of a man, men called him king, and said he was of the Irish land, who travelled from place to place, and chief to chief, seeking assistance."

"And how did they describe him?" asked O'Riain.

"Tall he was, and of large proportions. His voice hoarse as the raven's croak as if from constant shouting in battle or foray. But I know not if these stories be true, possibly they are some old hag's tale."

"It is strangely like Diarmuid," muttered O'Riain to himself. "Strangely like. But what think you of the story, MacMurrough?" he asked aloud, turning to the king, who was listening to the conversation.

"Of the proceedings of Diarmuid in Wales or Aquitaine I know nothing," replied MacMurrough, "but if he sought assistance amongst the Welsh marchers he got little, for when he returned to Ireland last year with the knight, Robert FitzGodibert, he only brought with him seventy men, and O'Connor soon forced him to send them back to their Welsh marches. Since he has lived with the monks of St. Mary's Abbey, seeing no one, nor taking any interest in public affairs."

"Diarmuid was not wont to be so quiet," remarked MacGiolla Patrick.

"No," said O'Riain, and then he added to himself, "I wonder if the sleeping lion will awake."

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All this time Diarmuid was living quietly, almost secretly at Fearna. He had returned in 1167, bringing with him a knight, Robert FitzGodibert and seventy soldiers. But the Ard-ri, on hearing of his return, had informed him that the presence of his armed guests was not desirable, and that they should be sent back to the land whence they came. As to himself he might live on at Fearna, provided he were willing to make no attempt to disturb the peace of the kingdom, or upset the existing order of affairs. No doubt the fierce old ex-king had stormed and raged, but not powerful enough to oppose the Ard-ri he had submitted, and sent back FitzGodibert and his men. His plans were not ripe, and it would have been fatal to his designs to push matters to an extremity. So unwillingly enough he submitted and waited, biding his time.

Following on his flight from Leinster he had travelled to Aquitaine, to the English monarch, Henry II. Throwing himself before him he related the manner in which he had been driven from his kingdom. Were the gracious monarch of England, the fame of whose glory and goodness had spread throughout the world, willing to assist him in the recovery of his principality, he would gladly place his hand between his, and become his faithful liegeman during the years of life which remained in him. Nothing loth, Henry listened to his complaints and protestations. He had long cherished designs on Ireland. The traitorous designs of Diarmuid would offer a splendid opportunity for the realization of his ambition. But just then the revolt of his Aquitanian subjects claimed all his attention, and willing as he was to accede to the wish of the traitor-king, he could

not do so. However, he gave him letters authorizing such of his subjects in England as were willing to join the adventure to do so.

Armed with these, Diarmuid travelled back to England. Up and down the country he journeyed, seeking out such adventurers as might be willing to give him help. He had not far to seek. In the town of Bristol he met a man broken in fortune and reduced to comparative poverty by riotous living; a man who was prepared to enter on any enterprise, however shady or desperate, which might offer the chance of retrieving his broken fortunes. This man was Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, whom men called Strongbow. To him Diarmuid held out a glittering prospect, offering him his daughter Eva in marriage, with the whole kingdom of Leinster as her dowry. With such a splendid reward in view the consent of the adventurer was easily gained. But a difficulty faced Strongbow. What would Henry think? Was it not likely that he would regard his alliance with Diarmuid with suspicion, the more so as the earl was not then in favour of his liege-lord. True, Diarmuid had letters from the English monarch authorizing such of his subjects as wished to do so to assist the royal plotter, but still Strongbow feared to act without special permission. No, he would seek a special licence from Henry, and having obtained it, away to Ireland to push his fortunes. Accordingly he informed the crestfallen Diarmuid of his intention, but he added: "Be you of good cheer, for as quickly as the king's patent lies in my hand, so quickly will I bring my men-at-arms over the sea to your aid."

Seeing that nothing more was to be gained in this quarter, Diarmuid hastened to St. David's, in South Wales. Here he was more successful. Arrived at the court of Rhys-ap-Griffith, he was informed of one Robert Fitzstephen, a brave knight who had long been held in captivity by that prince. At Diarmuid's request

the knight was released from prison, but only on condition of leaving Wales. Diarmuid seized the opportunity, and by an offer of the town of Wexford to him as reward, secured Fitzstephen's consent to enter into his service, and pass over to Ireland as soon as opportunity presented itself. And Fitzstephen promised that when he did go over sea many knights and horsemen should accompany him, many bowmen march behind his banner.

Satisfied then with the success of his traitorous designs, the ex-king turned his face towards Ireland, there to play for a little while his wily rôle as loyal man and repentant sinner, while his former subjects, all unsuspecting, permitted him to live amongst them, recking nothing of the evil which he meditated; foolishly trustful of the viper in their midst.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHASE—FITZSTEPHEN COMES

The winding of a hunting horn rang out blithely, its notes rousing answering echoes from the rocks and woods around. Out from the thick woods bounded a noble stag, foam flying from its open jaws. Its nostrils, widely distended, showed red and blood-like. Its flanks, heaving convulsively, dripped sweat at every bound. But though the chase had been hot, though the noble animal seemed as if pushed to the last gasp, still the antlered head was held proudly erect, as if in defiance of the pursuers who pressed on behind.

Suddenly, through an opening in the trees, dashed out a group of gaily-dressed huntsmen. Merrily sounded their horns. Lightly they poised their spears watching for the cast. Gracefully their mantles floated behind them. Loudly rang the baying of the wolf-hounds which strained forward in hot pursuit of their gallant quarry.

Long and ardent had been the chase that May-day. Far it had led the hunters through the wide-spreading woods of Hy Kinsella. Over hill and dale, marsh and shaking bog it had led them on and on, till now when the sun had travelled far on its course, the end of the chase drew nigh. Gallantly the stag had struggled to shake off its pursuers, but man and hound had outmatched its cunning. Even as the stag, game to the last, rushed into the wavelets which laved the shores of Bannow's Bay, the spear of Cian MacMurrough, thrown with unerring aim, pierced its quivering side, and with a shrill cry of anguish the noble beast crashed headlong into the waters. With

savage cries the hounds leaped on him, but there was no need for them now. That stag had run its last course. The woods would know him no more.

Tired and weary the hunters threw themselves down to rest amidst the rocks which reared themselves up on every side. The giollas, meanwhile, busied themselves drawing in the carcase of the stag on to the sandy beach. On the top of a giant rock which afforded a view of the bay spread out before him, Cian MacMurrough seated himself, and gazed out over the waters glistening in the sunlight. Suddenly he started and sat up erect. Rising and shading his eyes from the sun, he looked long and earnestly. Calling to some of his companions he pointed seawards. Far out over the sea they beheld three vessels standing in towards the bay, the sun-rays silvering their white sails.

"What think you of them?" asked Cian of one of his companions.

"Perhaps some fishers returning to their anchorage, or trading vessels of the foreign merchants," answered the person addressed, Brian O'Toole, son of the chief of Imail.

"You may be right," returned Cian, "but they seem over-large for trading vessels. And fishers are not wont to carry such goodly sails. Think you they are hero-ships?"

"Hero-ships!" echoed Brian. "Nay, you do but jest, Cian. What would lead them hither?"

"I know not," returned Cian. "But see you not that curious flashing of the sun? Might it not be the flashing from bright shields?"

"By my word you speak truly. I had not noticed it before," replied Brian. "What shall we do?"

"You and I will watch here," said Cian. "I like not the look of these strange ships, and would fain know more of them. They are still far out, but we will await their coming. Meanwhile, let the others go."

In a few minutes the wood had swallowed up the

retreating forms of the other hunters. Only the sound of their voices came back borne on the breeze. Gradually they became fainter and fainter in the distance, and then silence reigned. The beach was deserted of all save the two youths who watched out over the sea.

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The evening was well advanced as the stranger vessels came to anchor. Then across the waters came rowing boats filled with armed men. As the boats grated on the sandy beach, knights in full armour sprang out. Next came a company of men clad in coats of mail with armour reaching down along the thighs. After these came the archers carrying their deadly long-bows, five or six feet in length, the quivers slung at their backs filled with feathered arrows a full yard long. Last of all came a boat in which sat a lone knight. Stout in person, somewhat above the middle height, handsome in features, Robert Fitzstephen, for it was he, seemed well fitted for the furtherance of the plans of the traitor Diarmuid. No sooner had he reached the shore than the men set themselves to the work of throwing up a rude fortification of rocks and boughs of trees lopped off in the neighbouring woods.

"A goodly company," muttered Cian to his companion as he peered out from their hiding place, a cleft between two rocks high over the beach which gave them a full view of all that was going on below.

"Aye," replied Brian. "What country do they belong to think you?"

"I think they have crossed the sea from England. They do not appear to be Ostmen, at least such Ostmen as we know. These archers be like to those I have heard tell of from Owen, the Welsh merchant, who describes them as men having their hair cut close, and wearing short coats. If so they come from England.

The banners which the knights display are not those of any of our tribes. But let us listen."

Secure from observation they stood straining their ears to catch the least sound. But for a long time they heard nothing that might give them an inkling of the identity of the party. At last, right at the base of their hiding-place, a little knot of knights gathered. In their midst was the knight who had landed alone. By craning forward, even though at the risk of being seen, Cian could see that the knight was talking earnestly, but for a long time no word reached his ear. The knights were speaking in Norman-French, a language of which Cian had a fair knowledge, picked up from a monk at his father's court. Piecing the words together he arrived at the conclusion that the knights were anxious to have the news of their arrival conveyed to some person. But who the person was to whom the information was to be sent he could not make out. Still he listened intently, and then, as if they had at last reached a decision, the leader raised his voice, and the words were distinctly heard by Cian.

"You, Maurice, when the horse comes, will mount at once, and without loss of time set out to Fearna. See the king and inform him that we have come. Tell him that Fitzstephen is here, and bid him hasten to our assistance with what force he can gather."

Such was the amazement of Cian on hearing the words that he almost betrayed his presence by an involuntary exclamation. As it was, the knight turned and gazed sharply round him. But he saw nothing.

The king. What king? Cian questioned himself. Surely the stranger could refer to none other than Diarmuid. And, if so, the sooner his father heard of it the better.

Stooping he whispered in the ear of his comrade:

"We can do no more good here, Brian." And he told him all he had learned. "Go you silently. Procure a horse at the first opportunity. Inform your

father of all that has taken place, and bid him rouse out the clansmen. God guard you on your way."

"But you?" queried Brian. "What will you do?"

"The horse of which yonder knight speaks will supply me with a mount," replied Cian. "And then away to Fearna with the news. Now go."

Embracing Cian silently Brian reluctantly made his way down from the lofty perch, moving as silently as a shadow. Then looking back he waved his arm to Cian and darted in among the trees. For a while Cian stood listening to hear if there would be any outcry that would tell of the capture of his friend. But silence reigned, and assured of the safety of Brian he prepared for the accomplishment of the daring project which he meditated. Leaving the friendly cleft which had sheltered them, he crept out as far as he dared on a shelving rock. Lying full length he watched the approach of the horse, which was being led forward by a yeoman. Cian gathered himself together ready for the spring. Right under the place where he crouched the horse was halted. Fitzstephen turned to the knight who was preparing to mount, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Maurice," he said, "you will remember my instructions!"

At the same instant Cian leaped. The spring had been well calculated. Safely the young Gaedheal landed on the horse's back. The impact of his knee in the back of the sturdy yeoman who held the rein sent him crashing to the ground. With startled cries the knights dashed forward, but like a flash the horse was away, carrying its daring rider. Hastily a couple of archers fitted their shafts, and sent them whistling after the flying horseman. But they only rattled uselessly amongst the trees, and Cian's yell of defiance was borne backward to their ears as he disappeared into the fast darkening woods.

Late that night a horseman, his steed covered with sweat and foam, dashed up to the palace at Fearna,

Throwing himself from the horse's back, the rider staggered into the presence of the king, Murrough.

"Rouse out! Rouse out!" he gasped. "Yonder at Bannow a force five hundred strong have landed. They come to the aid of Diarmuid."

Then he fell senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER V

THE ATTACK ON WEXFORD

Across the rough country which lay between Fearna and Wexford a party of men were riding southwards. The party was small, consisting of only half a dozen horsemen. It was evident from the dust which covered them, and the droop of their horses' heads, that they had come a long distance. And such was the case. They had been riding from early in the day, and now that the shades of evening were closing in around them, had come within a few miles of their destination. Some distance ahead of the other members of the little party rode two horsemen, who from the richness of their dress appeared to be persons of some importance. As they rode they conversed in low tones.

"Think you," said the elder of the two, "that the traitor Diarmuid will march to the attack of Wexford?"

"I think it to be more than likely, father," returned the other, who appeared to be little more than a boy in years to judge by his smooth, beardless face. "I do not think he would be willing to leave such a stronghold unattacked. Besides it is in his own principality, and would be able to do him much damage if left to itself."

"No doubt that is true, Cian," replied the other, "and Diarmuid has little cause to love the men of Wexford."

"He has not," said Cian, for it was he, "but much cause to fear them. If the townsmen could be induced to hold out against him they would be able to do him great damage. No doubt the force which I saw yonder at Bannow will be of enormous assistance to him. For,

to me, they appeared to be formidable soldiers, clad from head to foot in steel, and armed with long, heavy lances, very different from our own men, who rush against the foe clad only in their woollen ionars. And they have bowmen who will be able to send their shafts to a distance to which our spears cannot reach, or be cast. I fear me much that we will be hard set to make headway against them. But we can only act as brave men should."

"Yes," replied the father, Murrough, so lately a reigning king, now a fugitive. "We can only do our best. But what causes me much bitterness of soul is the foolish trust, the want of foresight which seems to have seized us all. In our homes we sat unheeding, never thinking that there was a traitor in our midst. Feasting, talking, legislating, all the time that Diarmuid was plotting, planning, watching till the time was ripe for our undoing. And when his time is ripe he finds us weak and unprepared. The board has been swept clear of our men, and we have to extricate ourselves from the consequences of our own folly by flight. Ah! our foolish confidence that we had crushed him, rendered him incapable of further harm. Boy, I tell you that this day has been more bitter to me than any I have ever known. Here flying like foxes for shelter. Would to God that Murrough MacMurrough had died, his face to the foe, ere this disgrace had been!"

"But, father," Cian urged, "the affair is not so bad as you seem to suppose. Our men are brave, while they are but a handful."

"A handful, yes," rejoined MacMurrough, "but they bring with them a new style of warfare. They bring new arms. And they are a stranger people who, having gained a footing on our shores through the traitorism of this man and our own foolishness, may remain. Others may come. Then what of our country? I fear me much our supineness and want of union will cost us much."

"Do not say so, father," said Cian. "When the country rises they will be sent flying."

"Aye," replied Murrough, whom the events of the day seemed to have thoroughly embittered. "When we rise it will be only in little bands; one chief now, another again, each of whom, taken alone, will be wiped out. We, divided by our varying interests, will only act singly. They, united by their desire to defeat and plunder us, will move on like a wedge, gradually forcing themselves into the clefts which divide our clans, each from the other. We, with no common ground of action, will not act together. Have we not already seen it at Fearna, when you brought the news last night? As quickly as you had been attended to, I sent messengers here and there to bid the clansmen come to me, but Diarmuid had been before me. By promises and bribes he had gained them over. Ever since his coming he had been working in secret, while he slept in security. The messengers found most of the clansmen absent, and when the few of them who were faithful had assembled, they were a mere handful, too few to set out on a cattle-foray, not to speak of meeting five hundred men armed in such wise as those strangers. You have seen only to-day with your own eyes that Diarmuid was able to march with a full five hundred, while we, the lawful king and his son, watched the march of our successful rival from the shelter of a wood," and the speaker laughed bitterly, adding "Oh, we are well paid for our over-confidence."

Cian was silent. He saw that his father was in a bitter and despondent mood. And well Murrough might be. He saw himself and his son fugitives, shorn of power, the fickle clansmen who should have been his defenders, gone over to the traitor, attracted to his standard like the moth attracted to the blaze of the candle, recking little of the injury they were doing to their country, victims of an unfortunate system. And Diarmuid, the man whom they had despised as of little

account, regarded as one whose power for evil had been destroyed, was now, by the turn of the wheel, again on top, a more potent power for evil than ever, supported as he was by the spears of foreign soldiery. Possibly it might be only a small band of adventurers who had come to lend their aid to Diarmuid, as foreign mercenaries had come before, but in his heart Murrough feared that it portended more than this. Might it not portend an attempt at conquest by the powerful neighbours who lay beyond the white-capped waves, of the bounding ambition of whose king Murrough had often heard? If such should be the case, then God aid the poor country broken up into little tribes, and sept lands and kingdoms.

But an exclamation from Cian caused him to look up. Off away in front of him he beheld the ramparts and towers of Wexford rising up clear against the background of the sea. The sight of the towers of the Ostman town rising up before them roused the spirits of the whole party, and with renewed energy they urged their horses on. Pricking their ears at the prospect of a long rest, the animals responded gallantly to the urging, and in a few minutes the fugitives drew up before the gate just as darkness closed in around them.

At the loud summons of Murrough, a tall watcher, armed with the battle-axe beloved by the Danes, came forward.

Examining the party by the light of a blazing torch, he demanded their business.

"Go tell your chief, Olaf, son of Tomar," replied Murrough, "that MacMurrough desires to see him. He bears important news."

"Ho, there!" shouted the sentinel. "Anlaf, hither."

At his call, a man armed in the same manner hurried forward.

"Go tell our chief," said the sentinel, "that MacMurrough of Leinster awaits him without the gate."

The man hurried away, and had been gone but a few

minutes when the chief strode to the gate, accompanied by half a dozen armed warriors. He was a man of fierce countenance, his yellow beard long and unkempt. Armed with a huge battle-axe and long sgian, with his buckler slung at his back, he looked a worthy descendant of his northern forbears.

"What is the business which brings you hither, O King?" he demanded, gazing suspiciously at the group of fugitives who had dismounted and stood revealed in the red glare of the torch.

"I bring you news, Olaf, son of Tomar," replied Murrough. "Hither we have hastened from far away Fearna to bring you the news of a hosting by Diarmuid, the former chief of this country, who may be even now marching hither with a force of his former clansmen and five hundred foreigners."

For a few seconds the Danish chief remained silent. He seemed to be mentally reviewing the intelligence. Then turning to one of the warriors who accompanied him he bade him admit the waiting party. When the fugitives stood within the gate the Dane, turning to Murrough, said:

"This news you bring is of such importance that I would fain learn more."

In a few minutes Murrough had explained everything, and he concluded:

"This morning Diarmuid marched away from Fearna with a force of five hundred men in the direction of Bannow. I know not if he intends to march here, but it behoves you to be on the watch. This, my son, Cian, has beheld the foreigners with his own eyes."

"Speak, young warrior," said the Dane, turning towards Cian.

Cian described the arrival of the foreign force quickly. When he had done, Olaf turned, and beckoning one of the guards to him, ordered:

"Let the Thing be assembled within the hour."

And he added to the fugitives: "Come with me. Wine and food will not come amiss."

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The Thing was assembled. Yellow-bearded, blue-eyed Ostmen sat side by side with tall, long-haired Gaedhil of the native race round the low council-hall, where they had come together to discuss the news of Diarmuid's hosting. Up the hall strode Olaf, the son of Tomar. At his back came Murrough and his son Cian. Seating himself at the head of the hall, Olaf placed Murrough and Cian beside him. The hum of conversation ceased. Heads craned eagerly forward. With interest they gazed on the newcomers. The voice of Olaf speaking rang through the hall.

"Members of the Thing," he cried, "I have called you together that you may hear the news brought by these strangers, Murrough, King of Leinster, and his son. To us they have come. They bring us tidings of serious happenings. Happenings which concern us deeply, and against which it may be necessary for us to take measures for the defence of our town. They bring us news of the hosting forth of our old enemy, Diarmuid, who, perhaps, at this moment is marching hither with his own men, and five hundred foreigners whom he has brought over sea. But to make all things clear to you, let the strangers tell the news they bring."

He signed to Murrough and sat down. Murrough's story seemed to produce a profound impression on the assembly, and the hum of conversation again ran through the hall. But a lull came, and a grizzled man of warlike aspect, heightened by the scar which ran down the left side of his face, stood up.

"Has either of the noble strangers seen those foreigners?" he asked.

"Cian, the son of Murrough, has seen them as they landed from their ships," replied Olaf. "Let him speak," and he signed to Cian.

When Cian had described the landing, the arms, and general bearing of the newcomers, the scarred Dane exclaimed: "These men be strangely like Norman knights, and I have seen such archers when as a young man of twenty I marched with the forces of David of Scotland into the land of England. 'Twas in '38. Well I remember it, for do I not bear here a mark to remember it by," and he touched the scar on his face. "Be these the men then, Olaf, son of Tomar, look you to your walls."

The chief, Olaf, rose up.

"Men of the Thing," he exclaimed, "you have heard now the story which these friends of ours have brought. Let you decide what shall be done."

The buzz of many voices arose. But the assembly did not take long to make up its mind. Though primarily traders, they were also soldiers. Such waverers as were there were overborne by the warlike, and it was decided finally that the town should be defended. The voice of the scarred man, who was named Torgil, was heard over all, urging defiance of the foe. When the decision was come to, the chief, Olaf, arose once more, and cried:

"My brothers, you have decided well. Therefore let each man arm. Don helmet and buckler. Let sword and spear and battle-axe be taken down. Sound the trumpets in the market-place. Let the warfires be kindled. Man ye the walls to repel this enemy who comes."

With loud shouts the listeners answered him, and then dismissing them he turned to Murrough.

"And you, noble stranger," he asked, "what part will you take in the defence, you who owe such enmity to Diarmuid? It is not wont for MacMurrough to play the part of an onlooker."

"Nor will he," replied Murrough. "My sword shall be at your service."

"And you will give us your aid," said Olaf, turning to Cian.

"To the end," replied Cian.

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Rapidly broke the dawn over the town of Wexford. It showed the watchers on the town wall still standing to their arms. During the night no alarm had come, but a scout had just come hurrying in with the news that a large force was marching towards the town. Instantly all was preparation. Trumpets brayed forth their summons. Men came hurrying towards the market-place. The clash of arms prevailed where before nought but silence had been.

Immediately on the return of the scout the chief, Olaf, had summoned a council at which it was decided that instead of awaiting the attackers behind their walls, they should march to meet them. In a short time every man capable of bearing arms was mustered in the market, and then out through the wide-flung gate marched the men of Wexford against the enemy.

The force consisted of about two thousand men. They were, according to the fashion of the country, well armed, and eagerly pressed on to meet the foe. When they had advanced a couple of miles from the town they halted.

Soon the allied forces of Diarmuid appeared in sight, advancing rapidly, the sun glinting from the long lances and armour of the mounted knights and men-at-arms. At the formidable appearance of the oncoming troops a consultation was held amongst the chiefs of the Wexfordmen. Regretfully they decided that against such a force, armed in such superior fashion to themselves, protected by heavy armour, and having such a large proportion of archers, their spears and swords, bucklers and battle-axes would be of little avail in the open. The retreat back to the town was therefore ordered. Nor can we say they were unwise in so deciding. The force marching against them consisted of about eleven

hundred men, of whom at least a hundred were mounted on heavy chargers, and clad in complete mail, while the remainder was made up of about five hundred archers, and five hundred kern led by Diarmuid MacMurrough, armed in the usual Irish fashion. Little wonder then that the men of Wexford decided to meet the attack behind their walls.

But though they retreated they were not disheartened. As a preliminary to the defence the torch was applied to the houses which lay outside the walls. Then with brave hearts the townsmen manned their stout walls. Swiftly beams and piles of stones were placed in position ready to hurl down on the heads of the besiegers.

The united forces of Diarmuid and his allies came on. But they found only the smoking ruins of houses; they beheld the gates fast closed, the walls lined with determined men, the red buckler, sign of war and defiance, displayed.

Quickly Diarmuid and Fitzstephen made their dispositions. Placing their archers to command the towers, the mail-clad men were set to work to prepare passways across the outer ditches. When this had been accomplished the order was given to advance against the walls. Then forward dashed mail-clad knight and man-at-arms, bill-man and Irish kern.

On the wall stood Cian, his head bare, his long fair hair floating wildly in the breeze. Beside him stood Olaf the Dane. As the attackers dashed forward carrying their scaling ladders, he shouted, pointing to them:

"Here are your enemies. Stand now to the defence. MacMurrough Abu!"

With loud cheers the attacking force swept on. But bravely they were met. Down on them rained stones, beams and darts. The ladders which they had planted were torn from their positions, and hurled into the ditch beneath, carrying with them bold knight and yeoman, while above them the wild war-cries of Ostman and Gaedheal mingled in triumph.

But at one point the besiegers had gained a footing. A ladder strongly planted had resisted all attempts to dislodge it, and clambering rapidly several knights and men-at-arms had secured a footing on the broad wall. Well the bowmen had assisted them by raining showers of arrows on the spot. Perceiving the danger, Cian leaped forward, his war-cry pealing, his broadsword flashing. Before his furious onset the foemen gave ground. With a giant-like cut of his sword, the same which he had won at Tailltean, he clove the head of a man-at-arms in twain, spite of his cap of steel, who toppled over lifeless into the ditch beneath. Furiously he attacked another, but meantime several more of the attackers had gained the rampart, and he was sore beset.

"To me! To me! men of Wexford," he shouted, laying about him.

To his side sprang Olaf, who had heard his shout, followed by several burghers. Through casque and mail his terrible battle-axe crashed. Norman shout of "Dieu aide!" was answered with Irish yell of "Iobhar linn." Groans and cries of wounded men filled the air, but back the stout defenders of the wall forced the enemy. The wall was slippery with gore, and then was beheld the sight of a tall Gaedheal all unarmed as he was, seizing a mail-clad foeman in his arms, and leaping far out over the wall.

Hurrah! the wall is clear. With a will the defenders seize the ladder and send it crashing to the ground. Dispirited by the gallant defence, the attackers draw away, leaving the Wexford men in possession of their walls.

A strange lull succeeded the din and carnage. Away beyond the watchers could see the enemy engaged in earnest consultation. And though the attack had been repulsed, the Wexfordmen knew it would be renewed. Hence, no man sheathed his sword, no one laid aside his buckler.

Looking out across the wall, Cian noticed a sudden movement. Turning to Olaf, he cried:

"Yonder they come."

On rushed the enemy shouting madly their war-cries. A flight of arrows blackened the air, and was answered by showers of stones and darts. Down hurled the beams on the heads of kern and men-at-arms. But on they struggled doggedly and planted their ladders. Up, up they clambered, but with push of spear they were hurled back into the ditch beneath. Cian marked out a knight whose head had topped the wall, his plume waving proudly, his sword flashing in his right hand. Seizing a large stone which lay at his feet, Cian cast with all the force of his arm. With a wild cry the knight, struck full in the face, threw up his arms, and crashed in a heap to the ground, where he lay senseless. The fall of the knight completed the defeat of the assailants, and again they drew off. And there on the wall the townsmen still stood defiantly, their red buckler still displayed. But though the enemy had drawn off, dismayed and discomfited, the burghers had lost heavily, for there on the rampart, an arrow buried in his heart, lay their Danish chief, Olaf, son of Tomar.

Even though they had failed at the walls, the enemy had other means of attack. Down to the harbour, filled with shipping, they rushed. Clambering on board the vessels, they set them on fire, hoping, no doubt, that even if they could not reduce the brave burghers by the strong arm they might bring them down by the pinch of hunger. Mournfully the citizens watched the flames and smoke which ascended from the burning ships. Their destruction boded no good to them. The corn and wine with which they were filled could be ill-replaced. Of what use brave hearts and strong arms when the pangs of hunger gnaw at and weaken them?

. . . . .

The darkness of night has again fallen on the town. Silence broods where before all had been din and tumult. On the walls the sentinels watched. Beyond at the council-hall, the Thing had again assembled. But the fierce, yellow-bearded Olaf no longer presided. Bravely he had given his life defending the trust committed to him by his fellow-burghers. His place is occupied by the face-scarred Torgil. But a changed feeling had seized the assembly. The destruction of their ships laden with provisions had weakened their resolution. Men talked of hunger and thirst, plague and pestilence. Some whispered of the loyalty they owed their prince, Diarmuid MacMurrough. An old Ostman, his long beard whitened by years, voiced the view of the waverers.

"My brothers," he said, standing up in his place, his voice weak and quavering with age, "our loss has been great. Our ships have been given to the flames. My own ship, laden with corn and wine from the land of Britain, has been burned to the water's edge. The flames have devoured the yellow corn which weighed her down, have drunk up the red wine which she held. Hunger stares at us with gaunt eyes. And when it comes what of our wives and children? What quarrel have we with the Prince of Leinster? Why should we defy him, and place our lives in peril?"

"Oitir speaks truly," muttered an Ostman merchant to his neighbour.

But a sturdy blacksmith leaped to his feet. He was a Gaedheal, Conn by name.

"Shame, shame on the waverers," he cried. "We have twice driven back the attack from our walls. Let us hold them while we have life."

"Ay," broke in a Dane, seated behind the old corn merchant, "and have our town razed to the ground. Better live as subjects of MacMurrough than strew the walls with our bodies like Olaf has done."

"Ay," said another. "Let us surrender while we

can secure terms. MacMurrough will give good terms now. If we cause him further loss he will deliver the town to fire and sword."

Thus the waverers and faint-hearted gave voice to their counsels. But Torgil rose up, a scowl distorting his scarred features.

"Shame, shame on ye, men of the Thing," he cried, his voice rolling like thunder through the room. "Shame on ye, I say. Back from our walls we have hurled the attackers. All day we have stood the shock of their charges. And now, because they have struck at our ships, now that they lie blackened hulks on the waters of our bay, you, faint-hearted men, counsel surrender. But I, Torgil, say to you: Better that famine and pestilence stalk through our streets. Better strew the walls with our bodies than bend our necks to the yoke which this MacMurrough and his foreigners bring."

A low murmur of approbation greeted Torgil's words, but it was only a small section which approved. The waverers were in the majority. Little by little they wore down the opposition of the party who were for uncompromising defence. In vain the lion-like Torgil stormed and raged. Vain were the pleadings and urging of Cian and Murrough, who counselled a defence till such time as the country had been aroused. Finally the peace party had its way, and calling to their aid the bishop of the town, Joseph O hAodha, they overbore the war party who, hopelessly outnumbered, submitted to their proposals. But Torgil swore that sooner than submit he would quit the town and make his way to Waterford, a decision in which he was supported by many others, both Gaedhil and Ostmen.

Next day negotiations were opened for surrender. The townsmen delivered four of their chief men to Diarmuid as hostages for their fealty, while he guaranteed to them their rights. Then the better to animate the courage of his Norman allies, Diarmuid,

in accordance with his original treaty, bestowed on Robert Fitzstephen and Maurice de Prendergast, who had landed the day after Fitzstephen's arrival at Bannow with ten knights and seventy archers, the town of Wexford and the surrounding district.

But neither Cian nor Murrough waited to see the town so bravely defended, handed over to the traitorous Diarmuid. Leaving the council-hall immediately they saw the hope of resistance vanish, they called together the four clansmen who had accompanied them, and mounting their horses rode away from the town in whose defence they had struggled. With them went forth Torgil and some of his supporters. For a short way their roads lay together, then with mutual expressions of good-will the two parties separated, the ex-king and his son pressing on towards the country of MacGiolla Patrick; the Wexfordmen proceeding to Waterford. Sadly and silently Cian and his father pressed onward, the black spectre of defeat behind them, but the bright star of hope beckoning them on.

CHAPTER VI

IN OSSORY

Almost a month had flown by since the attack on Wexford by Diarmuid and his Norman allies. It is early morning. Standing on a grassy knoll, surrounded by woods and thickets, are three persons whom the reader has met before. They are Donagh MacGiolla Patrick of Ossory, Murrough of Leinster, and in the fair-haired youth we recognize Cian MacMurrough. At the foot of the hill stands waiting a giolla holding the bridles of their horses. Silently the little group stands. Evidently they await the coming of someone, some messenger: else why the anxious looks which they cast around them from time to time? Around them the birds twitter on the leafy branches. Above them the lark pours forth his song to the risen morn. But the waiting group have no ears for song of lark or twittering of birds. Something of more pressing importance seems to hold their attention. At last MacGiolla Patrick breaks the silence.

"Our scouts should have returned ere this," he said, turning to Murrough. "Or can it be that the wily old fox, Diarmuid, has slipped by unnoticed."

"Surely that could not be," replied Murrough. "The messenger who came last evening from O'Carroll reported that he had set out for Fearna with a force of three thousand of his own men, and all his English auxiliaries. It is not likely that such a force could move unnoticed."

"You are right," said Donagh. "It is not likely."

"Hist!" ejaculated Cian, holding up his hand warningly. "Someone comes."

Out from a thicket bounded a hare, and fled affrightedly. Past them, and away into the recesses of the leafy woods, flew screaming birds. It was clear that someone drew near. For all the sound the listeners heard the surrounding woods were free from human presence.

But out from the thicket in front of them darted a tall, bare-headed kern, his unkempt glib flying wildly, a long spear grasped in his hand, at his girdle a sgian. Stealthily he moved and silently, the rawhide cuarans on his feet giving out no sound. He might have been a spectre for all the noise he made. Not even a twig cracked so lightly he trod. Perceiving the waiting group he bounded forward.

"O noble prince," he cried, addressing MacGiolla Patrick, "yonder I have watched since the sun rose over the hilltops. Nothing was to be seen. The country lay peaceful and quiet as far as mine eye could reach. The glint of no hostile spear was to be seen. Still I watched, and about two hours agone I caught, a long way off, the flashing of many spears, the sheen of many banners. I waited till they were close upon me. O noble prince, they are a goodly force, men clad in steel such as mine eyes have not seen before, mounted on powerful horses which prance and curvet spite of the iron which covers them, archers with shorn locks, their bows a man's height, many kern whose banners proclaim them to be of MacMurrough's following."

"You have done well, Cormac," said MacGiolla Patrick. "How far off do you judge them to be?"

"One hour's march distant, O prince," replied the clansman. "When I came hither they were not more than two miles away. But like the storm-wind I come by secret pass and tochar. They be not less than an hour distant."

"Well have you done your work, Cormac," said the prince. "But watch and keep them well in sight. Much depends on your cunning. Come quickly to give

us warning, Now, my friends, we will go to prepare for their coming."

Mounting the waiting horses they rode off into the thick woods. Diarmuid and his allies would find a nest of hornets.

. . . . .

After their flight from Wexford, the fugitives had made their way without mishap to the country of MacGiolla Patrick. The Prince of Ossory received them cordially. With some of the happenings in the Hy Kinsella country he was already conversant, and on such points as he was ignorant they quickly informed him MacGiolla Patrick knew well that his territory would be the next to feel the shock of Diarmuid and his foreigners. For not alone was he one of the most powerful vassals of the Crown of Leinster, but his country was easily accessible to the attacker. Quite outside that much personal enmity entered into the matter. Donagh MacGiolla Patrick had some time previously captured, and cruelly ill-treated Eanna, the only legitimate son of Diarmuid, who had aroused his jealousy. He had also been one of the first to rise up against the tyrannies of Diarmuid. Without delay he prepared for the defence of his principality. From what Murrough told him he knew that it would be madness to meet them in the open, but behind every tree would lurk an enemy, from the thickness of the woods the darts of concealed kern would fly, every morass and bog and rock would be turned into a defence. Day by day the work of preparing the country went forward. Trees blocked up the roads and mountain passes, trenches were dug, and at points of vantage ditches were thrown up. Cian toiled manfully in the work. MacGiolla Patrick consulted him in everything. Strange it was to see the beardless boy, who only a few months before had been of such little account, now

become the inseparable companion of the powerful Ossorian chief.

Quickly the prince and his companions galloped back to see that everything was ready. The place where the enemy were to feel the first sting of the defence was well chosen. Through a dark, dense wood led the path over which Diarmuid's men would travel. Difficult at any time it had now been made doubly difficult by the way in which it had been cut up. Across it had been thrown a barricade made of the trunks of trees held in place by stakes driven into the ground. Amongst the trees and undergrowth at either side lurked the clansmen watching with glittering eyes

A couple of tall forms glided spectre-like up to the chief. A whispered order ran through the waiting men, and then Cian peeping through an opening beheld the hostile force coming into sight. On they came apparently with little expectation of the reception which awaited them. They were almost on the barrier before they perceived it. In confusion they halted.

"Now," thundered the voice of MacGiolla Patrick. "Strike, clansmen."

"Now," pealed the voice of Cian. "Faire! MacMurrough Abu!"

Stones and darts whistled through the air. Shrieks and cries rang out. Caught in the narrow pass, unable to cut a way through the plashed hedges, the enemy suffered heavily. Many an archer fell to rise no more. Vainly they attempted to climb the barrier. Hurtling stinging darts met them, and back they reeled. Against the hidden foe the bowmen could do little. Their shafts were spent idly. It was only the mail-clad men-at-arms who saved the force from rout. Against their steel coats and shields the stones and darts of MacGiolla Patrick's clansmen struck harmlessly. At length a way into the woods was cleared. Sword and battle-axe cut through the plashed branches. In rushed knight and yeoman and kern shouting their battle-cries. But no

enemy met them. True, a few dead Ossorians lay round, their eyes gazed blankly to the skies. Of the living there was no trace. They had gone, leaving Diarmuid in possession of a heap of dead bodies. For an hour they had held the passway. Stinging like scorpions they had vanished into space without giving knight or man-at-arms a chance to blood his sword. Cursing and railing the discomfited raiders returned to gaze on the scene of destruction. The rugged pass was choked with dead and dying men. Welsh marcher and Wexford kern lay side by side, yeoman and long-haired clansman.

All day the force made its painful march onwards. In the open they were safe. But let them enter into the woods. Let them venture into pass or tochar. There the slogan of the Ossorians smote their ears. There darts and stones and javelins met them. Every inch of the woodland was a battleground. Discouraged and weary the invading force pushed on. The raid which they had expected to be but a triumphal procession had turned into a painful progress marked by blood. At one point, where the Irish had dug three trenches, the defence was pressed so stoutly that the raiders were held from morning till well on into the evening. Deeming it useless to attempt to proceed further in face of the stubborn resistance to his advance, Diarmuid gave the order to retreat.

Arranging the force in two bodies, his own personal forces under the command of his son Domhnall, the mail-clad Anglo-Normans in the rere, the retreat commenced. Close on the heels of the retreating men followed the Irish. Retiring as rapidly as possible they drew close to the borders of Ossory.

Now they had entered a wide-spreading forest. Above their heads the branches of aged oak and tall pine laced and intertwined. Under their feet brawling streamlets rushed down the mountain side.

Clinging mud gripped and held the feet of the har-

assed men, rendering their progress more difficult. To Diarmuid it was a place of ill-omen, as more than once in earlier days his men had suffered heavily therein. Here the Ossorians swooped down. Attacked on all sides the footmen of Diarmuid broke and fled. Only the men-at-arms and some of the archers held together. Issuing from the thick forest, the king turned to de Prendergast.

"Brave knight," he said. "Our men have fled. Devise some plan whereby we may drive back our pursuers and stay the rout."

"The open plain lies before us," said Maurice de Prendergast. "Let us tempt those enemies who annoy us on to it. They possess neither hauberks nor breast-plates. We will crush them. Robert Smith," and he called a bowman to his side, "take you fifty archers and hide in yonder thicket. We knights and men-at-arms will ride on. The enemy knowing nothing of our ambuscade will doubtless follow. Let not an arrow be sped till they have passed. Then when you see their backs let bolt and shaft fly. We will turn at the same time, and charge into their midst. If then, noble king, the corpses of your enemies do not strew the plain and glut your desires, no knightly word have I."

Joyfully Diarmuid welcomed the proposition, and the archers hid themselves in the thicket. And now the defence, so bravely and cunningly conducted, was to be placed in jeopardy by the natural impetuosity of the Ossorians. On rushed the Irish shouting madly, casting their darts and javelins. Recklessly they charged up against the foe, who turning about rode them down, or sent their long lances crashing through their naked breasts. At the same time the shafts of the bowmen whistled out from the thicket in their rear. Taken front and rear the Irish, fighting stubbornly, gave way.

But help was near. With a small band of men, Cian made a dashing charge against the thicket where the

archers were concealed. Around him men fell thickly. Arrows whistled round him and glanced from his buckler. A shaft carried away his bairead, but he seemed to bear a charmed life. On, ever on, swept the little band. They penetrated the wood, and spearing and cutting down the archers, cleared it. The gallant deed gave a chance to the Irish to rally. Back again to their woods and fastnesses they retired, while the traitor-king and his allies withdrew to Leighlinn on their way back to Fearna.

They carried back with them the knowledge that Ossory's chief still held out defiant and undismayed. Though the Irish had suffered heavily in that last red conflict, though two hundred and twenty gallant clansmen slept their last sleep beside the Barrow's waters, amongst the hills and gleanns of Sliabh Mairge, still the forces of Diarmuid and his allies must have suffered frightfully. The bones of many a Welsh bowman, and kern from Hy Kinsella, must have bleached amongst the morasses and passes which owned the sway of Donagh MacGiolla Patrick.

CHAPTER VII

ILL NEWS—DIARMUID SWOOPS AGAIN

Within the house of MacGiolla Patrick two men were seated chess-playing. Intently they were watching the board whereon they manœuvred their puppets. Silently they moved, each man watching for the mistake which would give him the victory. Stillness reigned in the apartment.

"Check!" suddenly cried out MacGiolla Patrick, who was one of the players.

At the same instant a loud outcry sounded without the door, and into the room where the Prince of Ossory and his young companion Cian MacMurrough were seated, burst a couple of clansmen, supporting between them a kern, his clothing torn to ribbons, his left arm dripping blood, his head bound round with a blood-stained bandage.

"How, now?" cried MacGiolla Patrick, starting to his feet.

"Noble king," replied one of the clansmen, "we have brought hither a messenger who, sorely wounded, has come from the chief of Imail."

"What tidings do you bring? Evil, methinks. Else why those wounds?" asked MacGiolla Patrick, turning towards the wounded kern. "Ho! without there, bring wine for this wounded man."

A draught of red wine sent the blood coursing through the veins of the weak and drooping messenger. Raising his head and speaking in a voice weak and faltering, the kern said:

"Evil indeed are my tidings, noble chief of Ossory. Woe is me that I should be the bearer of such; for sad

and sorrowful is my story. Two days agone the false MacMurrough burst into our country with fire and sword. Countless were the men whom he led. Many bowmen .and spearsmen in his train. Like the red-winged thunderbolt he descended on our valleys. Bravely we struggled against him; but he had taken us by surprise. No watchers guarded our gleanns. No watchfires had blazed on our hills. Like a wolf he came, secretly and unknown, surrounded by steel-clad warriors. Against them we threw ourselves, and many a soldier of his will shout his war-cry no more. But of what use all our strivings. Like the red lightning he passed, leaving behind him nothing only bloody corpses and smoking ruins. At night I stole away by orders of our chief, who lies badly wounded, to bring you the news of Diarmuid's foray. Watch you well, O noble prince, for once again this wolf shall come to your valleys. Ah! wounded and sore to death am I."

His head dropped forward on his breast, and it seemed as if the stricken man had yielded up his spirit. Bounding swiftly to the door, Cian summoned the leech. Tenderly the wounded man was borne away, so that he might try to fan into flame again the flickering spark which yet remained in his poor stricken body.

After seeing to the comfort of the gleannsman, Cian returned to the room he had just left. He found the chief pacing up and down the apartment. So deeply was MacGiolla Patrick immersed in thought that he did not notice the entry of Cian. On the table lay the chessmen. But the game had lost its interest. A game of a different kind claimed attention now. At last Cian spoke.

"This happening is of serious import, O noble king," he said.

MacGiolla Patrick started.

"Ah, I thought I was alone," he said. Then seating himself he went on. "This thing which has happened will, I fear, bring war and ruin to our door once more.

We have been fools. Fools that we did not, as we did before, combine against this king and his foreigners. We have allowed him to gain too much power. I had hoped that his failure to reduce us would have kept him quiet. We have regarded him as an ordinary raider, but he aims at more. This attack on O'Toole, following so quickly on his raid into the Deisi against O'Faolain, shows how powerful he has become, and clears his ground for a further attack on us. Would that we had moved together against him, then we would have rendered him powerless. Now it may be too late. But there is little use for idle regrets now. We must act."

"Yes, we must act," replied Cian. "We know not when he may be here."

"To-morrow may be too late," resumed the Ossorian. "And as your clansman said, MacMurrough will come again. Let us be ready."

Far into the night they sat arranging their plans to meet the attack which they were convinced would be soon renewed. To him MacGiolla Patrick called his chief warriors. He impressed on them the necessity for constant watching. He ordered that every pass and gleann be guarded, that vigilance should not be relaxed night or day. He gave orders that all provisions and cattle should be removed as speedily as possible, so that when Diarmuid came he would find little spoil.

"Yonder by Achadh Ur," he cried to the warriors, "we shall make our final stand. There let the ditches be dug and the ramparts raised. When MacMurrough comes we will receive him as we did before. Instead of lowing cattle he will find armed men. Let every pass become an ambuscade, every gleann a tomb. My children, swear that no clansman of Ossory shall shrink before the invader."

Up over the heads of the grim warriors were raised their strong right arms. Through the lofty room ran a deep-throated rumble of assent. No sign of shrink-

ing there. Each man was ready to stand the shock of danger.

When they had gone MacGiolla Patrick turned to Cian, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"To you, Cian," he said, "I will entrust our first line of defence. Young you are in years, but you have displayed courage and skill equal to that of my chiefest warriors. Under your leadership I will place a band of fifty chosen men. You will watch for the coming of this enemy at the farthest limits of our territory. The moment he enters annoy him in every way, always retreating before his advance, but stinging in the most unexpected places. Be watchful and cunning as the fox. Do not expose yourself or your men. You will have only a small force, but it is as large as I can spare. With an equal force I will act in the same manner, keeping in touch with you. The remainder I will place behind our defence at Achadh Ur, whither you will fall back. There we will meet again when the time comes. Do you accept?"

"Gladly, noble Donagh," replied Cian. "I will do my best to deserve your trust."

Next morning with his band Cian marched away to watch by Barrow's banks for the coming of the foe.

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With his little band Cian placed himself in ambuscade near where the lordly Barrow flows. Eagerly they watched, but none the less cautiously. Nor was the waiting long. Gazing from the place where he lay hidden Cian beheld a gallant array swing into the plain. This was to be no petty cattle foray, but a strongly-supported attempt to crush out the man brave enough to defy the traitor. His heart almost sank within him as he beheld the ranks on ranks of men. The words of MacGiolla Patrick came back to him: "Would that we had moved together." Ay, had the chiefs moved

together how different the story might have been. The folly of it, that even now against a traitor king and a foreign force, they did not act together, and drive the traitor from their midst. We can hardly wonder if the heart of Cian was a little sad; if he felt discouraged. But he thrust his thoughts aside. He had work to do.

The forces moving against Ossory seemed overwhelming. Diarmuid had put forth all his strength. Overawed by his growing power many of the chieftains, who before were his bitter enemies, had given in their fealty, and marched with him. It was not love but fear which led them to his standard. A full 5,000 men he had gathered together, and the Anglo-Norman newcomers formed a powerful auxiliary force. Diarmuid intended that this should be a smashing blow for the proud Prince of Ossory. Halting by a grassy slope, the forces of Diarmuid prepared the encampment for the night. The watch fires blazed redly. The sentinels watched, but they little thought that fierce eyes glared at them, that grim, implacable enemies were near.

It was the hour before the dawn, the hour when weary men sleep most soundly. All round the woods were silent. The birds sleeping in their nests watched not. Neither did the moon give forth its light. The watch fires had died down. Perhaps the sentinels, weary after their long day's march, drowsed as they leaned on spear or battle-axe. For who would dare to attack that proud army? Who be brave or hardy enough to cross its path? Across the still air floated the hoot of the night-owl. The long grass seemed alive with gliding forms. From tree to tree they flitted. Then a tall form wriggled through the grass towards the camp of Diarmuid. Closer and closer it drew to the drowsing sentinel, dreaming, perhaps, of his home amidst the Welsh hills. A spring, a faint struggle, a vice-grip on the throat, and the lifeless body was thrown aside. A similar fate was meted out to the two other watchers by the Anglo-Norman camp, for it was against it the attack was

directed. Then once again the mournful hoot sounded. Ghost-like the attackers dashed into the sleeping camp. Men half-awakened springing from their sleep sank back in the cold sleep of death. The bodies of archers and men-at-arms cumbered the ground. The clash of steel rang through the air. The wild yells of "MacGiolla Patrick" pealed everywhere. Men terror-stricken by the sudden, silent attack rushed from their tents only to fall victims to the axes or spears of the Ossorians. Through the English camp passed the avalanche, leaving behind a trail of blood. As suddenly as they had come they were gone; vanished as if the night had swallowed them up. Cian MacMurrough had done well. His little party had reaped a deadly harvest, for behind in the English camp they mourned twice a hundred men.

Moving swiftly, ever falling back before the advance of the invaders, Cian's little band carried on a relentless warfare. Should the watch slacken, a party linger behind, there Cian's men swooped down, and slaughtered men marked their course. Thus beset Diarmuid and his allies moved on. But his force was powerful, and however much Cian and Donagh might injure it and delay its progress, they could not stay it. So after doing everything that it was possible to do, after inflicting enormous losses on the invaders, they met, as MacGiolla Patrick had said, behind the stockade at Achadh Ur.

Here behind a deep trench, topped with stakes and hurdles, the Ossorians made a last bitter stand. Even if defeated they could retire further into their fastnesses where Diarmuid dare not follow. The defence against the overwhelming forces of the traitor was stubbornly maintained. Stoutly the men of Ossory held their barrier. Three days they kept the tyrant and his Anglo-Normans at bay. At length, attacked in force by the armoured men-at-arms, the stockade yielded, but Diarmuid had won only half a victory. Seeing the

uselessness of holding the riven barricade longer, the brave Ossorians retreated, leaving Diarmuid to console himself with the stockade which had cost him so dear.

A strong force under Cian and Donagh covered the retreat of the men of Ossory into the marshy country which offered them shelter. So bold and fierce were their men that Diarmuid feared to attack them. He would have used his mounted knights and men-at-arms to crush them, but in that land of shaking bog and quagmire he feared to do so. So with fierce, burning rage he had to look on at the escape of the still unsubdued Ossorians.

CHAPTER VIII

A RIFT—AN IMBECILE KING

A rift had come in the lute of Diarmuid. Arrogant and violent he had first succeeded in antagonizing the people over whom he ruled. Now we see him offending and antagonizing Maurice de Prendergast, one of the Anglo-Norman knights who had come to assist him in his designs. What the actual cause of the quarrel was is wrapped up in mystery. But there seems good reason to believe that it was a dispute concerning lands which Diarmuid, in the first flush of enthusiasm, and regardless of the rights of the possessors, had bestowed on de Prendergast, but which he took from him to present to one of his newer aiders, Maurice FitzGerald. Stung to resentment at the breach of faith de Prendergast quarrelled with Diarmuid, and receiving little satisfaction quitted his service, and set out to Wexford, so that he might take shipping back to Wales. He took with him two hundred men.

But Diarmuid, alarmed at the withdrawal of so large a force, resolved to prevent the incensed knight from leaving Ireland. He hoped, no doubt, that de Prendergast would be reduced to the necessity of returning again to his service. Accordingly he sent word to the men of Wexford, now his loyal subjects, to prevent the embarkation of the defected knight. When, therefore, de Prendergast arrived at Wexford he found no means of transportation for his force, and the townsmen threw all the obstacles they could in his way.

But the wily Diarmuid had overshot the mark. Foiled in his attempt to get away, de Prendergast, who seems to have been one of the most honourable

of the adventurers, withdrew from the town. He did not return to Diarmuid, however. Instead he communicated with the Prince of Ossory, and offered to enter his service. Gladly MacGiolla Patrick accepted the offer. He would now have a force equal in armament to oppose to Diarmuid's foreigners. The news quickly reached Fearna, and Diarmuid decided to cut off de Prendergast from Ossory if possible. Under Domhnall Caomhanach, an illegitimate son of his, he dispatched a strong force to drive back the knight. Close to St. Mullins the two forces met. But finally de Prendergast cut his way through, and pushed on into Ossorian territory.

And then commenced a series of raids on the possessions of the King of Leinster. Day and night the Ossorian forces swooped down into the Hy Kinsella country, returning again to their own laden with spoil. In the service of MacGiolla Patrick, de Prendergast was as indefatigable as he had been in that of his opponent. Burning with anger at his treatment, he delighted in harrying and destroying the lands of Diarmuid.

As for Cian, he looked with very unfavourable eyes on the new alliance. He recognized that there was some justness in the reply that help was good whatever its source, which Donagh made when he objected to the acceptance of de Prendergast's offer. Nevertheless he would very much have preferred that they should struggle alone rather than entangle themselves in an alliance with foreigners who were only trying to profit by their discords. At the same time he saw the great weakening in the power of the traitor-king which the defection of the Anglo-Norman had brought about. Often when discussing the matter with his father he bewailed the inactivity of the Ard-ri and the other princes, who apparently blind to the danger, were sitting idly at home or pursuing their private quarrels, while the enemy gained both time and power. For

possibly the strangest feature of the history of the time is the fatal apathy which had gripped the Irish princes. Faced by the danger of a more powerful invasion they did nothing. They seem to have given no attention to the signs and portents, or rather they did not look on the presence of an English force in the country as the portent of anything serious. They regarded it as nothing more than a mere force of mercenaries come to the aid of one of their number, which would be sent away when he required them no longer. Had they not seen Danish mercenaries employed in like manner from time to time. Why then trouble about the matter? But an examination into their motives is rather a matter for the staid historian, and may not enter into such a story as ours.

But at last it seemed as if Rory O'Connor had taken alarm at the danger which threatened. Possibly some voice had whispered to him away in his Connacht home that the little cloud which had appeared beyond in Leinster would spread till it had covered the whole Irish sky. However it may have been he had resolved to act. To Ossory one day came a herald who informed MacGiolla Patrick that the Ard-ri had decided on a hosting in force against Diarmuid. Gathering his clann away marched MacGiolla Patrick to join the other princes and assist at this second expulsion. Cian and Murrough went with him, Murrough dreaming, no doubt, of the kingdom which might again be his. But alas for human hopes!

Arrived at Fearna with a large force Rory O'Connor, instead of decisively striking down the traitor and standing by his former sentence of outlawry, spent his time in negotiations. By the offer of large gifts he seems to have endeavoured to induce Robert Fitzstephen to separate from Diarmuid and leave the country. Failing in this he endeavoured to rouse the patriotism of the king by pointing out the inevitable result of bringing in foreigners. If Diarmuid would

dismiss them his kingdom would be restored to him, and the Ard-ri himself would enter into alliance with him. Here also he failed. Finally a treaty was agreed upon between Rory and Diarmuid, whereby the Kingdom of Leinster was restored to the latter, who agreed to recognize O'Connor as paramount monarch of Ireland. And by a secret treaty Diarmuid agreed not to bring in any more foreigners, and to send away the bands who were already in the country as quckly as order had been restored in Leinster. Believing that he had delivered the country from the threatening danger, the Ard-ri marched away from Fearna, carrying with him the hostages given by Diarmuid as guarantee for the performance of his part of the treaty.

The feelings of Murrough were very bitter as he returned with MacGiolla Patrick to Ossory. He felt that he had been but a pawn in the game. Pawnlike he had filled his place while the need existed, and then when the more fortunate king had manœuvred into position he was thrown aside. Now, indeed, he was a wanderer from the city where before he had been ruler. Saddened and broken he bowed his head to fate. Monarch he had been; wanderer, refugee he was. His uprise had been rapid, his downfall more rapid still. Had Murrough been a man of determination he would have struggled against the buffets of fortune, but he was not a man of heroic mould. He went down without a struggle.

As to Cian he thought little of his own misfortunes. Though his tanistry to the kingship of Leinster was now swept aside, he thought little of his loss of power. He would have been more than human if he had not felt some regret for his reduced position, but his father's fall more than his own troubled him. He felt that the change would mean much to Murrough, would completely break his spirit. He was young, and struggling comes natural to the young. He would make his way in spite of everything.

But anger surged through him as he thought of the imbecility of the Ard-ri. With the power to crush out the spark of danger he had left it smouldering on. Nay more, he had fanned it, for he had given to the acts of Diarmuid the appearance of right and justice. Where he should have struck, he parleyed. By his restoration of Diarmuid to his kingdom he had condoned and approved of all his acts. And what had been gained? Cian asked himself. Naught but an empty promise. For Cian had little belief that the word of Diarmuid would be kept. He feared it was merely a device to gain time.

And the suspicions of the young Cian were fully justified. Hardly had the Ard-ri's forces quitted Fearna than Diarmuid hurried away to Wexford to meet Maurice FitzGerald who had landed there from Wales with about one hundred and fifty men-at-arms, archers, and foot-soldiers. How loudly the wily old fox of Leinster must have laughed at the foolishness of the Ard-ri as he pressed forward to meet the new arrival. How complacently he must have stroked his long beard as he thought of the poor, foolish O'Connor gone back to his Connacht home; of the brainless, witless princes and chiefs who followed the lead of an ass dressed up as a lion. We wonder did some vision grow up before his mind's eye of that other Diarmuid of his race who only a few score years before had, from his Leinster palace, wielded the power of the over-kingship. Did he see himself his successor? We little doubt it, for the aims of Diarmuid were high, his ambition lofty.

CHAPTER IX

THE RESOLVE OF MacGIOLLA PATRICK

Silence had fallen on the assembly which sat in the council chamber of MacGiolla Patrick, Prince of Ossory. The prince had resumed his seat. Instantly the hum of conversation ran through the room. Excitedly the grim warriors, men whose bodies bore the scars of many wounds, men who had hurled back the proud array which Diarmuid had led against them, discussed the words of their chief, which had burned deep into their turbulent, warlike minds. They seemed to be agreed. Murmurs of "O'Moore must be taught a lesson" ran round. But now silence had come, a silence in strange contrast to the former hum. It had come at the bidding of Cian MacMurrough, who had risen from a seat on the right hand of the prince. Eagerly the warriors craned forward to hear what this youth, who had come amongst them a few months before, had to say.

"Noble King of Ossory, and you, brave warriors," he cried, his young voice ringing through the room. "By your side I have fought in the trouble which so recently beset your country. With you I have drawn the sword in its defence. With you I have watched by its borders, defended the valleys. Night and day I have marched with you, and shared all the perils which crowded so thick upon you. Is it not so, O men of Ossory?"

A murmur of assent ran round the assembly.

"Then," resumed Cian, "you will know how much it grieves me to take my stand against this proposal which has been set before you. It grieves me much

that mine should be the task to oppose the plan of your prince, who has received me and mine. For close are the bonds of friendship which bind me to him. Even so I look with loathing on this projected attack upon Leix. When a wolf comes to attack your flocks do you not all combine against him? How much more so that now beyond at Fearna the wolf of Leinster has brought his foreigners amongst you, not to ravage your flocks and herds alone, but to lay on your necks the yoke of servitude. What matters it that the Chief of Leix has refused to send his cattle tribute? It injures us little. This land of Ossory is great and powerful. Rich in flocks and herds. Our freedom, the freedom of our hills and valleys, is of more worth to us than a few cattle. The danger is great. Petty discords amongst ourselves aid the enemy. Let us prey on the cattle of the man who has brought in the foreigners if needs be, but weakening O'Moore we but weaken ourselves, and when we have weakened ourselves our country may fall."

He sat down. A murmur swelled out. It was evident that Cian's words had made an impression on his hearers, that they were swayed by conflicting emotions. But the tradition of years fought against the ideas so boldly enunciated, the example of all those chiefs who had been swayed by the strong hand.

Again silence fell on the gathering. A warrior had risen to his feet. It was Murrough, the unfortunate ex-King of Leinster. The past few months had aged him considerably. His downfall had made him a shadow of his former self. The blows of fortune had bent his tall form, and accentuated the careworn look of his countenance. With respect the warriors listened to his words.

"Warriors of Ossory," he said, "I came amongst you a fugitive driven out from the kingdom bestowed on me by the princes, which had been forfeited by the false Diarmuid, who had proved himself unworthy of

his position. To you, noble kings and warriors, I have since endeavoured to pay back the deep debt of gratitude which myself and my son owe to you. When it was needful to draw the sword I hosted forth with you. I shared in all your dangers and triumphs. And, men of Ossory," and his voice took on a prouder ring, "were it necessary to march against the enemy the sword of Murrough would be at your service. But here, warriors, you ask of me a different service. You ask me to draw the sword, not against the man who has brought in the foreigner, who has given them a grip in the country, not against the man who acted treacherously against your chiefs, not against the man whom three years ago you drove away from his kingdom as an unworthy chief, but against a neighbour who has refused to pay tribute. Ah, men of Ossory, my eyes have been opened by misfortune. Not by harrying one another can we hope to triumph over this danger which threatens, but by combining against the common enemy. Let no man here say that Murrough is ungrateful. In the red field I have tried to repay, but do not ask me to draw my blade against a fellow-chieftain. Too long we have bared the sword against each other. The time has come to halt. My sword is yours against MacMurrough and his foreigners. Against Leix I will not draw it. O, noble prince," and he turned towards MacGiolla Patrick, "forgive me if I appear ungrateful."

Up rose a warrior, his grizzled hair and beard harmonising but ill with his sturdy frame and over-scarred face.

"O, noble king," he cried, "Murrough of Leinster and the young warrior, his son, have spoken well. Mine eyes have seen the blood of brothers flow in fratricidal strife on many a battlefield. Fain would I welcome the chance of union amongst our chiefs, but we hold our position only by force. Should this chief of Leix, who has been our vassal, be not punished he will think our blood has turned to water. He will scoff

and jeer, and point the finger of scorn at us as craven warriors. O king, I like it not; I like it not."

From the scowling visages it was clear that the few words of the old warrior had done more to excite the feelings of his hearers than if the chief of Leix himself had come in person to defy them. Like a rock it stood triumphant over all desire for conciliation, for union, that feeling that in the strong hand alone lay safety. Heir of years and years of strife and divided power it would require more than the pleadings of Cian and Murrough to blast its fatal power.

Hardly had the old warrior resumed his seat when Donagh MacGiolla Patrick rose.

"Men of Ossory," he exclaimed. "To me it is a bitter grief to know that our honoured guests from Hy Kinsella cannot aid us in our hosting against O'Moore of Leix. Of the importance of their services to Ossory we are fully aware. For them no words of mine could express our gratitude. To Cian, the son of Murrough, we, in particular, owe a meed of praise. His services in the late campaign against the forces which Diarmuid MacMurrough led against us cannot be forgotten. Let not those guests of ours imagine that we will think them ungrateful. The veriest slave is welcome to our hospitality, and if so, why not they? They have come to us driven out of their principality by violence. They have aided us with their swords. Not theirs, I say, men of Ossóry, the need for thanks, but ours. 'Tis then that I regret that these men who have aided us in such fashion cannot aid us now. For their service I would give much. I cannot blame them for their refusal. Gladly would I draw back from the task before us, not through fear, but that I would welcome a cessation of our quarrels. But it cannot be. The messengers sent by us to O'Moore have been treated with insult and contumely. O'Moore, our vassal, has refused to pay the tribute which custom demands, has refused to give the hostages which are my right. If then we

do not punish this insult, our power will have passed away, our territories will be subjected to the attacks of this O'Moore and others, our heralds and messengers treated as they have been treated by this chief of Leix. Ossorians, I think I have said enough to show you the necessity for this hosting. Do you discuss the matter amongst yourselves and decide."

The discussion continued only for a short time. Then the old warrior who had before spoken rose up.

"We have decided, noble MacGiolla Patrick," he said.

"And what is your decision?" asked the prince.

"We have decided that the hosting is necessary. With one voice we declare that the sword must be drawn to punish this defiant O'Moore."

"Let the clansmen be gathered then," cried MacGiolla Patrick. "Ere to-morrow's sun has gone down we must be in the land of Leix. Summon to me the knight, Maurice de Prendergast. Bid him come within the hour."

Cian had again risen to his feet.

"Noble MacGiolla Patrick," he cried, "I regret your decision. Once more your swords will be dyed in the blood of brothers. But the words have been spoken. No word of mine can make it otherwise. But never will my sword be drawn against a countryman of mine while Diarmuid and his Anglo-Normans are devastating our country. Farewell, ye men of Ossory. I will go hence. I will go to seek service against this traitor and his allies."

"And I also," cried out Murrough, rising. "I shall go too."

In an instant everyone present was on his feet. Consternation and sorrow was written on every face. The withdrawal of a hundred men would hardly have caused such sorrow. MacGiolla Patrick was the first to break the silence. "Noble Murrough," he cried, "why should our hosting against O'Moore cause your departure. You have said you will not march with us, neither will

we force you. What then the reason of your withdrawal from our territory?"

"A MacMurrough is seldom an onlooker," replied Murrough. "Since I cannot draw the sword with honour on your behalf, I go where blows fall thickly. MacGiolla Patrick, naught else is left to me save honour and my sword."

"And you, Cian," asked the prince, "will you also go?"

"Noble chief," replied Cian, "you who sponsored me in arms, do you think that it is easy for me to go hence? 'Neath your roof I have spent many happy days. By your side I have borne the brunt of battle. With your clansmen I have withstood the shock of the enemy. Think you I go with light heart and thoughts free from sorrow? No, my heart within is sore and bitter at this parting. But on that day when you stood by my side on Tailltean's plain I swore never to draw my sword but in an honourable cause. Forgive me, noble Donagh, when I say that my conscience forbids me to embark in this cause. Then why ask me stay an unwilling spectator. Yonder where there is work to be done against the traitor and his allies I will find use for my sword."

"By my word," growled the black-browed clansman, handling his battle-axe ominously, "this beardless youth talks glibly of his conscience."

"Ay," quoth another, whose head was disfigured by the loss of an ear, "were his sword as keen as his conscience he would be a dangerous foe."

"Ah, Brian One-Ear," chimed in a third, "it is easy to see that you were not with us yonder by the Barrow when Diarmuid came the second time. You would have had a different opinion of yonder stripling. His sword was keen then as his conscience is now."

"But why should they go?" growled the first speaker. "We may have need for them by and by."

"Ay, ay," the excited cries burst out. "Soon Ossory may have need for every man."

"Do not let them go."

"MacGiolla Patrick," cried Cian, laying his hand on his sword, "I go hence."

The prince stayed the tumult with an imperious wave of his arm.

"Shame on ye, men of Ossory," he cried, "let these MacMurroughs depart in peace. Abuse not the hospitality of Ossory. Bravely Murrough and his son have spent themselves in your service. They are free to come and go as they please. The man who raises battle-axe or unsheathes sword against them answers to me. Go, clansmen, prepare for the march to Leix."

When the clansmen had gone, the prince turned to Cian and Murrough.

"I regret this decision of yours," he said. "I had hoped to long see you occupants of my house. But you are determined. 'Tis better then that you go."

Calling a giolla he ordered him to bring horses. Embracing them warmly he bade them farewell, and expressed a hope that ere long they should meet again. Mounting, the wanderers rode away from the house which had been their home. At a turning in the road Cian drew rein and looked back. Standing close to his dun was the chief of Ossory gazing mournfully after them. Raising his bairead Cian waved it. The arm of the chief raised in salute responded to his farewell. Then with sorrowful heart Cian resumed his journey along the road to Idrone.

CHAPTER X

O'RIAIN—THE ATTACK ON DUNDONOLF

O'Riain, the chief of Idrone, was alone. The trampling of horses sounded without, and a clansman presented himself before him.

"Noble chief," he cried. "Two strangers await you. They have ridden hither from Ossory."

"Bid the strangers enter," said O'Riain. "I will receive them here."

The clansmen hurried away, and in a few minutes the heavy curtains which hid the doorway were thrown aside, and the strangers stood before the chief.

With a cry of welcome O'Riain embraced them. Then he ordered that food and wine be set before them.

"What good fortune has sent you hither?" he inquired. "I had little expected to see you."

"Nor we you," replied Murrough. "Last evening we rode away from the house of MacGiolla Patrick, who has hosted against O'Moore of Leix."

"Why did you leave?" asked O'Riain.

"Because we had no desire to mix ourselves up with such a quarrel. Therefore we refused to march with him, and came to you hoping that we might find employment for our swords against MacMurrough and his foreigners."

"You have done well," said O'Riain. "Too long have we been divided one against the other. And now the foreigner has come. No doubt they are only small bands, but they may arouse the cupidity and ambition of their king, who lusts so much after power. And when we see the manner in which O'Connor acted the other day at Fearna against Diarmuid I fear very much for

the future. Would that we had a strong man at the head of affairs, one whom the princes and chiefs could look up to, who would crush the turbulent and haughty, and bind the tribes together for the protection of the country. Then we need not fear the strangers."

"We need not," said Murrough. "But I fear me much we are on the verge of evil times."

"I fear so," said O'Riain. "Each chieftain must struggle alone. We have no rallying point to turn to."

"But," broke in Cian, "may we not be alarming ourselves with unnecessary fears. This trouble may pass away."

"Heaven grant it may," replied O'Riain. "But I fear we will pay dearly for our turmoil and divisions."

"The position is decidedly bad," remarked Murrough. "Each chieftain fights only for the strengthening of his own hand, with never a thought of a central authority which would be a protection to us all."

"Ah, would that we had a strong central government," said O'Riain, "as in the days when Tara ruled the land of Eireann, its edicts and laws respected throughout the land."

Thus the two older men discussed the national state of affairs. They railed at and feared the position, but like men caught in a whirlpool they could find no means of escape. True, the chiefs were turbulent and violent, but rather were they the products of the unfortunate system of government than of their own inclinations. They were not unpatriotic, but having no strong central authority to look up to had been forced into a position of antagonism to each other. Had there been such an authority, strong enough to crush out the lawless, and protect the loyal, they would have supported it and given it allegiance. As it was they had to struggle against each other to maintain their places while the Ship of State, buffeted in the Waves of Discord, went to pieces on the rocks. Silently Cian sat listening. The adversity of fortune had sharpened and ripened

his young intellect, and in his heart he feared that his father and O'Riain were right.

But a diversion came to turn their thoughts into other channels. The sound of excited voices was heard outside, and striding quickly to the door O'Riain demanded to know the reason for the tumult. The voice of a clansman answered him:

"A messenger has just arrived from O'Faolain of the Deisi."

"Conduct him hither," ordered the chief.

The Deisian, splashed with mud and dirt, quickly entered.

"Noble chief of Idrone," he exclaimed, "I have come hither sent by my master, O'Faolain, prince of the Deisi, to inform you of the landing of a force of foreigners by the rocky promontory of Dundonolf, lying eastwards of my prince's city of Waterford. They have erected a fortification there, and are harrying the country. My master craves your assistance in the attack which he is preparing to make on them."

"Right willingly will I give it," cried O'Riain. "Raghnall O'Faolain shall not ask in vain. Will you be our guide on the march?"

"Gladly, noble chief," answered the Deisian. "To my prince I will lead you by paths known only to myself."

"Good," said O'Riain. And then he called his steward and ordered:

"Place food and drink before this man. Send hither Colla."

To Colla he gave orders to summon the clansmen to the green before the dun.

"And make you haste, good Colla. Before the moon wanes we must be on the march to join our arms with those of O'Faolain. Therefore let no man be absent from the muster."

When the clansman had hastened away he turned to Cian and Murrough.

"My friends," he said, "you have arrived opportunely

There is work for our swords at Dundonolf. You will come with us."

"Most gladly," replied MacMurrough. "As you say, we have arrived opportunely."

A few hours afterwards, under the light of the pale moon, the Idronians marched away to the assistance of O'Faolain under the guidance of the messenger whom he had sent.

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The first of the immediate followers of Strongbow had arrived in response to the piteous appeal sent by Diarmuid MacMurrough by the hands of his secretary, Maurice Regan, to that adventurer. Strongbow had at last obtained the much sought for permission from the English monarch, Henry II, and in earnest of his good intention to aid the traitor had despatched across the Channel Raymond le Gros with ten knights and seventy archers. Landing at the rocky promontory of Dundonolf, about eight miles from Waterford and twelve from Wexford, on the 1st May, 1170, Raymond had at once set about strengthening his position by the erection of a fortification. Secure then at his base he commenced to harry the surrounding lands, retiring within his fortified camp with the spoils which he had carried off.

But the Irish of the district were not inclined to submit tamely to the predatory attacks of Raymond. Raghnall O'Faolain, prince of the Deisi, resolved to attack the stronghold of the newcomers. He sent to O'Riain of Idrone and to the Ostman settlement at Waterford, which owed him allegiance, asking for their help. His request was responded to with alacrity, and soon a force of three thousand men had gathered for the onslaught on the position of the Anglo-Normans. Dividing the force into three bodies, one of which he placed under the command of Cian, the second under O'Riain of Idrone, with whom was Murrough MacMur-

rough, and the third under himself and Sitric, the Danish chief of Waterford, he pushed forward to the attack.

Within the fort the knights sat eagerly discussing the situation. Anxiety was written on every countenance, for a scout had come in with the news that a large force was advancing.

"This, gentlemen," exclaimed a very stout knight with yellow, curling hair and large grey eyes, who sat at the head of a roughly constructed table. "This is serious news. Our force is small though our position is strong eno'."

"Serious indeed, good Raymond," quoth a tall, handsome knight, with grey, rather prominent eyes, and thin neck, which seemed scarce able to support his head. "But then we have the superiority in arms, and many of our men wear armour. 'Tis not likely this rabble which comes will prevail against us."

"Let us not be over confident, good comrades," said the knight who had first spoken, "let us not despise this force which moves against us. Rabble they may be in that they do not practice our tactics and discipline. Ill-armed they may be as compared with ourselves, but I have spoken with knights who have fought against them. They describe them as men prodigal of life and limb, men who shrink not from the shock of battle. Men fierce and valorous in fight, swift as the wind, and inured to fatigue. Think you then it is well to despise them?"

"Swift as the wind they have been on many occasions in fleeing from our arms," replied the handsome knight, who was named Hervey de Montmaurice.

"May not our arms and armour have given us an advantage, good Hervey?" queried the prudent Raymond, known to his companions as "le Gros." "But let us not quarrel. It behoves us to look to our defences. Knights, get you to your posts. The enemy will soon be here."

Quickly the knights hurried away. Archers were

posted at the point where they could most effectively gall the on-coming enemy, while the little party of knights waited in reserve ready to rush to any point of the rough, stout barricade over which the nimble foe threatened to scramble. And then the storm broke.

On came the Irish like a torrent, charging boldly, recklessly up against the walls from three points. But a flight of shafts met them, and thinned their ranks. Against the whizzing, stinging shafts their darts and spears were very ineffective weapons. Most of their darts fell short, while before the flying arrows their men sank back to earth. Repulsed, the Irish drew back out of range.

Again they came on, their war-cries pealing loudly. Again the flight of arrows blackened the air. With their bodies the Irish strewed the ground, but still they came on in spite of that deadly shower.

"St. David aid us!" shouted the knight called le Gros, "if they scale our walls we are lost."

"Stand! stand to your defence," shouted Hervey de Montmaurice. "God and St. David."

But on the Irish rushed. Had they any weapon of equal power to the deadly long and cross-bow the foreigners would have been vanquished. But alas! their weapons, so deadly and effective in the open, and where the fighting was close, were little use against a determined enemy entrenched behind stout walls, who could mow them down before they could come within striking distance. Again they wavered. But one band, led by a slender youth, swept on doggedly. Right against the walls they charged, and began to clamber up. The danger was imminent. To the threatened point rushed the knights. With desperate energy they thrust back the men who were endeavouring to climb over. Norman lance and sword met Irish spear and battle-axe of those who had purchased a precarious hold. But the knights won their way. Down from the wall were hurled the Irish, maimed and lifeless.

Fighting desperately to maintain his grip, Cian MacMurrough was hurled to the earth beneath. Bereft of his senses by the fearful fall he lay as one dead. A couple of clansmen carried him away. Dashing water into his face they quickly roused him to consciousness. Fortunately no bones were broken, and in a few minutes he was again ready for the fight. The Irish had lost heavily. Having no shelter, and exposed to the terrible arrows of the garrison, they had fallen thickly. On the rocky strand they lay in heaps.

Within the fort there was much uneasiness. Their numbers had been reduced by ten.

"By my knightly troth!" cried Raymond le Gros. "This has been hot work, much hotter than I expected. Fortunate for us that we stand behind high walls. Unless we can drive these Irish off by some stratagem I tremble for the result."

"Ay," exclaimed a knight standing close by. "That last rush almost carried us. You spoke truly, Raymond, when you said these men were not to be despised."

"Fool that I am," suddenly cried out "le Gros" with a furious oath. "Why did I not think of it before? These cattle," and he pointed to an enclosure in which were confined the cattle they had driven off, "these will be our salvation."

In a few rapid words he sketched his plan which was that when the Irish should make their next attack they should drive out the youngest and wildest of them. Urging on the enraged oxen they would follow, and fall on the broken and dismayed ranks of the Irish. With shouts of approval the knights and yeomen rushed to do the bidding of Raymond.

They were not kept long waiting. On came the Irish again, moving slowly at first, and gradually quickening their pace as they neared the walls. But no shower of arrows flew cloud-like across the sky. No. Silence reigned as if the Angel of Death had swooped down on the garrison. Astonished, irresolute,

the Irish paused. But the Anglo-Normans gave them little time to think. It was the moment they awaited, wide were flung the gates, and out came tearing a herd of maddened wildly-bellowing cattle, the rocky ground shaking beneath their feet, their glaring eyes seeming to shoot fire. Urged on by the pricking of the lances and swords of the foreigners behind, they rushed upon the ranks of the dismayed, astonished Irish. Lifted upon their horns men were tossed into the air, and falling were trampled to pulp beneath their rushing hooves. All too well the stratagem succeeded. Broken and disorganized the Irish fell easy victims to the swords of the Anglo-Normans, and to the trampling feet and goring horns of their four-footed allies. In a few moments the attackers, broken and routed, panic-stricken, were flying across the plain, away from the fort where they had almost conquered.

But one gallant attempt was made to stay the disaster. With a small band of men Cian MacMurrough flung himself across the path of the fleeing men. Madly he shouted to them to stand and face the foe. But it was in vain. King Panic was triumphant. Everywhere it reigned. Seeing that everything was lost, Cian fell slowly back towards the shelter of a wood which lay some distance away. Like the rock standing grim and defiant in the raging sea the little band flung aside the attacks made upon it, but sorely they suffered. At last the shelter of the wood was gained, but the little band was reduced to three. It was only time. As they reached its friendly shelter the intrepid young leader sank to the ground. Only his indomitable spirit kept him up to this. But his two companions seized his arms and hurried him along. When the danger of pursuit was over they laid him on the ground, and examined the wound which had brought him down. In his left shoulder a shaft had buried itself, and the blood oozed slowly from the wound it had made.

"This is a nasty wound," said one of the men as he plucked out the arrow.

"A little lower, and this young warrior would never draw a blade again," replied the other, who was known to his companions as Scarred Torgil. "This be just such a wound as laid low our stout Olaf yonder at Wexford. This young warrior fought on that day. I hardly expected to see him here. But let us not spend time. We must bind his wound. In Waterford we will find a leech."

All the while that he was speaking Torgil was working rapidly. Removing Cian's mantle and ionar he roughly bound up the wound, and then running to a stream which babbled by, he bathed Cian's forehead in the cool water. At last Cian opened his eyes, and looked into the faces bending over him.

"Have I been wounded?" he asked faintly.

"Yes," replied Torgil briefly. "An arrow wound in the shoulder. But here, take this," and he held a large dock-leaf filled with water to the lips of Cian, who drank eagerly.

"Now," went on Torgil, "we must hurry. We have out-distanced pursuit, but prowling enemies may be about. Think you, you can walk?"

"I will try with your assistance," said Cian, smiling faintly. "But I think we have met before," and he gazed into the scarred features of the Dane.

"Ay, you are right," replied Torgil. "Yonder at Wexford. But come. We must be going."

Slowly and painfully Cian and his two companions made their way towards Waterford, pushing on through the recesses of the forest. Late that evening they entered the city through the gate of St. Catherine.

. . . . . .

Behind at the camp of the Anglo-Normans a strange and bloody scene was being enacted. In the centre of the fort, surrounded by the garrison, stood a band

of seventy prisoners who had been captured in the disastrous rout. It was evident from the scowling visages of the men who surrounded them that little mercy would be shown. They had fought bravely, but the fortune of war had turned against them, and delivered them into the hands of their enemies. But proudly the bound men held their heads. They had been beaten at the game, and could but suffer the penalty.

The knights were gathered together. They were discussing the fate to be meted out to the captives.

"Brave comrades," said Raymond le Gros, "yonder are the prisoners. What shall be our action in their regard? Two courses are open to us. We can release them, or hold them to ransom. It is for you to decide."

"Good Raymond," spoke up Hervey de Montmaurice, "there is still another way of dealing with them, which you have not mentioned."

"And what is that?" inquired Raymond.

"We can deliver them over to the executioner," replied Hervey. "And I think it is the better plan. We are here in the midst of enemies. We must strike terror into them by all means in our power."

"My comrades," cried Raymond, "I think the time has come for mercy. We have conquered. These men who are our captives have fought bravely against us. Their cause was honourable, they are not now to be treated as thieves, traitors, or freebooters. They fought in defence of their country. Adverse fortune has delivered them into our hands. Let us be merciful. Let us not stain our honour by such a deed."

"Our Raymond has become a very paragon of virtue, forsooth," sneered Hervey, laughing loudly, and casting a quick glance round the circle of knights. "Methinks the monk's cowl would suit him better than the knight's helmet."

"Say on, Sir Knight," growled Raymond, flushing angrily. "Jokes ill befit the occasion."

"Our good Raymond here is fearful that our honour be stained," resumed Hervey. "He asks us to be merciful. But, comrades, if we allow ourselves to be swayed by such sentiments better that we take ship at once, and leave the land to this miserable people. What if the enemy should come again and conquer us, tell me, I pray you, do you believe they would deal mercifully with us? But what use multiplying words when the thing is plain? We must employ the victory which has given those men into our hands to strike terror into others. By the execution of these men we must give warning of the fate which awaits those who oppose us."

A shout of approval greeted the sentiments expressed by de Montmaurice. It was plain the fate of the prisoners was sealed. None knew it better than the captives. Some amongst them understood the language of their captors, and to such as did not understand, the scowling looks bent on them were sufficient index.

"We pay the forfeit, Conn," whispered a warrior, whose head was bound round with a bloody bandage. "We have fought our last fight, I fear."

"There is little doubt of that," returned his fellow-prisoner, a tall Gaedheal, whose right arm hung useless by his side. "We have no mercy to expect from these foreigners. But they shall not hear me crave for mercy."

"Nor me," growled the first speaker.

"Silence!" roared a man-at-arms, giving a vicious thrust with the butt of his spear to one of the speakers. "But speak on," he laughed. "Speak while you may. We'll soon silence your prating tongues."

"Comrades," said Raymond, "it is useless to prolong this discussion. You have heard what I have said. I ask that the prisoners be held to ransom. You have also heard what the knight, Hervey, urges. Which shall it be, death or ransom?"

"Death!" came the yell from all sides. An evil

smile passed across the handsome features of Hervey de Montmaurice. He had won.

"Since you have decided," said Raymond, smothering his rage as well as he could, "you will also decide the method of death."

"Ah!" said the smiling Hervey, "the prisoners shall not say we kept them waiting. The axe and block is a knightly way of dying, too knightly for such rabble."

"Very good. The block let it be," said Raymond. "And who will be headsman?"

"Say rather headswoman," smiled Hervey, "yonder wench," and he pointed to a fierce-looking virago with tousled mane of yellow hair, "shall be the executioner. I am certain she will like the work. What say you, comrades?"

A yell of delight greeted the proposition. 'Twas plain the proposal was one after their own hearts. Shouts of "Alice, come hither, thou stout wench." "Alice of Abervenny, our new executioner," rose on all sides.

"Come hither, wench," said Raymond. "Do you accept this work?"

"Ay," exclaimed the ferocious virago, "and I have only one regret."

"And what is that?" asked the knight.

"'Tis my bitter grief that it is not more," replied the virago in a tone of suppressed fury, her hands clenching and unclenching convulsively, while her eyes shot fire. "I wish that the prisoners were thrice seventy that I might strike off their heads, and so glut my rage for blood. For then indeed, brave knight," and her voice rose, "then, indeed, my handsome lover, my Davie, whose blood they have spilled would be avenged. O my handsome Davie, you whom I followed from our Welsh hills," her voice had risen almost to a scream. "But, sir," she exclaimed, growing calm, and grasping the knight's arm, "give me the axe."

Like a fury, her arms bared, she stood wielding the

well-tempered axe which had been handed to her. Rage had distorted her features. As the condemned men walked to the block she gibed and mocked them bitterly. A very devil seemed to possess her, standing there bereft of all feelings of womanly pity or commiseration. But her gibings and mockeries fell on deaf ears. No appeal, no prayer for mercy came from the lips of the unfortunate captives. Heads held proudly, eyes glaring defiance, they stepped to the block, and submitted to their fate. When all was over, the last headless trunk lying quivering on the ground, Alice of Avervenny turned to where Raymond le Gros stood moodily watching the archers and yeomen tossing the bodies over the rocks into the sea beneath.

"More," she shrieked. "More heads for my axe."

"Your work is done," said le Gros, coldly.

A shriek of fury and disappointment rang to the heavens. Raising the blood-stained axe, Alice of Abervenny cast it far from her. Like a whirlwind she rushed through the open gate. An instant she poised on a tall rock, then—a flying form shot out into space, and Alice of Abervenny lay crushed and mangled beside the bodies of her victims.

CHAPTER XI

THE WATCH AT WATERFORD

In a room in the house of Brodar the wine merchant, which stood hard by the Church of the Blessed Trinity in the Norse-Irish city of Waterford, two men were talking earnestly; one, the younger of the pair, was speaking.

"What think you, good Torgil, of the story?" he asked.

"I think it is of the utmost importance," replied his companion. "Sitric is not one to alarm himself needlessly. He is a warrior, and the sight of heroships does not frighten him. If this were the same old hag's tale I would not heed it much, but it is not. With his own eyes Sitric has seen the ships, and has counselled constant watchfulness."

"Watchfulness is always necessary," said the first speaker, "particularly at present with these foreigners landing on our shores."

"You are right," returned Torgil. "We know not how soon our swords may have work to do again. At the Thing to-day Sitric told that when out in his galley by the Rock of Tuscar he beheld far away at sea a large fleet of ships crowded with canvas. From their size and manner of build he judged them to be hero-vessels, but they were too far off to make out for certain. Alarmed, he ordered his men to row back to harbour as speedily as possible. He found Ivor, the captain of the fishing-fleet preparing his galleys to put out, but he ordered him to remain in port. When Sitric fears it behoves us to be on the watch."

"And what measures has the Thing decided on?" asked the first speaker.

"They decided that the watches should be doubled, and the defences manned. All galleys are to remain in port, and a swift galley was sent out to summon such vessels as are out back to shelter. Every burgher was ordered to arm, and be ready to man the walls and towers. If the alarm comes to nothing so much the better, but our measures will do little harm. And Cian," Torgil turned to his companion, "I felt that you were fit to don warlike harness again. I urged that you be given a place in the defence. I told them of your bravery at Wexford and by the seashore at Dundonolf. With eagerness they accepted my suggestion, for every sword will be useful if there is anything in this tale. Did I do right?"

"You always do right, good Torgil," replied Cian. He was now thoroughly recovered from the arrow-wound he had received at Dundonolf. The leech had declared him well and strong once more, and he longed to be doing something. The face-scarred Torgil had nursed him through the fever which followed his wound with a tenderness hardly to be expected from one of his fierce nature. Night and day he had watched by his bedside, and when the leech shook his head he had refused to give up hope.

"Yes, thanks to you, I feel fit to draw my sword once more. Why, look here," and Cian seized an unsheathed sword which lay on the table, and made it swish through the air. "I feel as strong as yourself at this moment. I owe much to you, my good Torgil. If it were not for you I might be lying now with our poor friends at the foot of the cliffs of Dundonolf."

"Say no more," cried Torgil, "you fought by my side at Wexford. I could not see a gallant youngster fall into the hands of our enemies. But let us go. Sitric will be waiting for the burghers beyond at the Tower Reginald."

So saying he seized his huge battle-axe and slung his buckler at his back. Cian hung his sword at his

belt. Then they both sallied out into the narrow street, and hurried towards the Tower of Reginald, which lifted up its black shadow above the walls. Past them hurried men, all in war-like gear, hastening also towards the tower. As they went along Torgil told him that Sitric was in command till the arrival of Raghnall O'Faolain, and his son Malachi, who had been summoned to their assistance and were expected during the night.

They found the chief, a large red-bearded Ostman, with a fierce glint in his steely blue eyes seated at a low table. Little bands of men were departing every instant for the various points to which they had been assigned. As soon as Sitric caught sight of Torgil, he called out:

"Welcome, good Torgil. I watched for your coming."

"How goes the work, good Sitric?" asked Torgil.

"Good, good," replied the chief. "But I have work for you to do. What of the young warrior of whom you spoke?"

"He is here, good Sitric. I have brought him with me." And he indicated Cian.

"Young warrior," said the Dane, turning towards Cian, "I have heard much of your prowess. Torgil tells me you have fought at Wexford. But you are not of our town, and I cannot command your service."

"But," said Cian, as the other paused, "I place my sword at your service. I have been a guest in your town for three months back, thanks to good Torgil here. I wish to take my place with its defenders. Besides I have a particular desire to strike at these foreigners."

"Good, it is settled then," said Sitric. "Go you with Torgil. I will place under you twenty men. You will take up watch in the Tower of Turgesius. Watch that no enemy approaches unnoticed. Away now to your posts."

With their band, Cian and Torgil hurried away to the tower. Through the night they watched, but no enemy appeared. The morning light had begun to

redden the eastern sky when Cian, looking over the battlemented walls, beheld a force advancing towards the city. The trumpets blared forth the alarm, and the burghers stood to their arms. But they soon perceived that it was not an enemy who approached. It was the force led by Raghnall O'Faolain to the help of the city. In a few minutes the newcomers had entered through the gates and were fraternizing with the citizens.

It was well that the citizens were on their guard. The fleet which Sitric had seen at sea was the fleet of Strongbow, who, having at last obtained the necessary permission from his liege-lord, was hastening with a force of fifteen hundred archers and men-at-arms to the side of Diarmuid.

Immediately on the arrival of the new force a council of all the chief warriors was summoned at the Tower of Reginald. To it came Cian and Torgil fresh from their watch at the Tower of Turgesius. Raghnall O'Faolain was at the head of the assembly, while his son Malachi and Sitric were also present. Eagerly the defence of the city was discussed, but everything appeared to be in order. No one could think of anything which had been left undone.

"I am glad to hear that we are so well prepared," said Raghnall. "But there is one thing to which we must pay particular attention. I mean the keeping of a watch on the movements of the enemy. It will be of little use to have our defences in order, every man at his post, if we do not have early knowledge of his movements and his strength. No doubt you have sent out spies, you keep watch from the walls and towers, but we want more than that."

"What then do you suggest?" asked Sitric.

"I think that as well as the ordinary scouts we have sent out we want someone, if possible, with a knowledge of their language, who will penetrate into their camp, and try to find out their plans. I know it is a task of

great difficulty and danger, where the person entrusted with it must carry his life in his hands, but the work must be done. Know ye of anyone to whom we can entrust such a task?"

"I know not," replied Sitric. "The task is difficult."

But Cian stood up at the end of the room, where he had been sitting silently.

"I, noble chief, will undertake the task," he said.

"Methinks he is over-young for the work," remarked Raghnall in a low voice to Sitric. "Who is he?"

"The son of Murrough, till lately King of Leinster. A warrior of much promise, if report speaks truly, young though he be."

"Ah, methought I knew his face," muttered Raghnall. Aloud he said: "You understand the difficulties which beset this task?"

"I understand," said Cian briefly.

"And you think you can carry it through?" questioned the chief.

"I will do my best," replied Cian. "No one can do more."

"Good."

Then turning to the assembly, Raghnall said: "Return ye to your posts. Let not the watch be relaxed."

As the burghers filed out Torgil seized Cian by the arm.

"Cian," he said, "turn back from this task while there is yet time. Why should you run such a risk?"

"Is not a warrior's life always a risk, good Torgil?" said Cian. "My word is given. I will carry through the work or die as befits a MacMurrough."

"Give me your hand then," said Torgil. "Mayhaps I shall never see you again."

"Never fear for me, good Torgil," returned Cian. "When the swords flash at the Tower of Turgesius you will see me by your side, unless," he whispered to himself, "I lie at the foot of Dundonolf's cliffs. Cheer up, good Torgil, the danger is not so great as you imagine."

A hand-clasp, and the stout Dane, who shrank not in

the crush of battle, went from the tower with hanging head, trembling with apprehension for the safety of his young friend.

Alone with Raghnall and Sitric, Cian pondered deeply the project. He did not disguise from himself the danger which he would run in going to the English camp. A chance word or exclamation would betray him. But then his knowledge of the language would serve him well. Whatever the danger he would not draw back now. The voice of Raghnall roused him from his reverie.

"Young warrior," said the chief, "Sitric informs me that you volunteered for service in the defence of the city. How long have you been here?"

"Three months," replied Cian. "Badly wounded by an arrow-shaft in the unfortunate affair by Dundonolf, I was assisted here by Torgil, who watched over me at the house of Brodar the wine merchant, yonder by the Church of the Blessed Trinity. To him I owe my life."

"And now you are going to risk it," said Raghnall.

"A warrior's life is all risk," replied Cian.

"You are willing to undertake this work. It is not without danger," said Raghnall.

"I have known danger. I have given my word," replied Cian.

"There is nothing more to be said then," said Raghnall. "We need only arrange details. You must of course go disguised. Get as close to the English camp as you can, enter it if possible. Hear and see everything, and when you have learned all return here as quickly as possible. You have a knowledge of the language?"

"Yes," replied Cian. "Some knowledge."

"Well then, get ready for your enterprise," said Raghnall, "and God go with you. Be very careful, for I have no desire that your noble father should have a son as well as a kingdom to mourn."

CHAPTER XII

THE GLEEMAN

A gleeman was making his way slowly along the road which led out towards the rocky promontory where the Anglo-Normans had made their camp. A true man of motley he was. On his head he wore a bairead striped with red and yellow. His short cloak of coarse saffron cloth was covered with spots of black and blue. The ionar composed of alternate stripes of blue and yellow had one white sleeve, and the other red. His triubhas was of black and white stripes. On his feet he wore cuarans of soft deer skin, with the hairy side turned outwards. The face of the wandering gleeman was painted a light greenish hue, the ghastly effect of which was heightened by two spots of vivid red which flamed on his cheek bones.

From the leathern belt, which encircled his waist, was suspended a small bunch of silver bells, which he shook from time to time, the shaking producing a sweet, plaintive resonance which lingered in the air. In his hand he carried a six-stringed tiompan.

As he proceeded slowly towards the sea he kept up a constant shaking of his little bell-branch. He evidently did not wish to come unnoticed, and tried to attract the attention of anyone who might be in the vicinity by every means in his power. Snatches of wild song broke from his lips from time to time. At last it seemed as if he had come to the end of his journey. Below him lay the camp. Screened from observation, he looked down upon it, on its fluttering banners and armed guards. Seating himself on a rock he burst into wild plaintive melody, accompanying him

self on the tiompan. Though it was evident he had no desire to conceal his presence, he took pains to make it appear as if his coming were purely accidental. The camp was near, yet he did not approach it. For a while he continued his song. But no one came. Still keeping well hidden he drew nearer. He was now so close that he could catch the voices of the archers as they made merry over their evening meal. Again he burst into song. This time he was more successful.

"Hist!" suddenly exclaimed one of a group of archers who sat round a blazing fire. "What sound is that?"

"I know not," cried another. And then he turned to his comrades. "Someone is singing among yonder rocks," he went on. "It brings to my mind the singing of our Welsh minstrels. What say you, comrades? Shall we go and see who this singer is?"

The others eagerly assented to the proposition, but one of them, more cautious than the rest, inquired:

"What will Sir Raymond say? You know the orders: that no strangers be admitted."

"We have not spoken of admitting him," replied the first speaker. "Though I cannot see what harm a wandering minstrel, such as the singer appears to be, could do us."

"Nor I," said the other who had spoken. "Besides it is very lonely here. This singer would afford us much amusement. I will go and see who this singer is. If he be armed, why a sword thrust can pierce the breast of a minstrel as well as that of a soldier."

"Ay, you say truly," said the first speaker. "Come."

Cautiously they advanced towards the place where the singer sat, their swords held ready unsheathed. Though the singer, whose back was towards them, was aware of their approach he made no sign, but continued his song. When the soldiers beheld the fantastically-clad gleeman seated there on his rock they burst into loud laughter.

"See!" cried one to the other. "A wandering gleeman."

"Yes," said the other, "and a sweeter singer I have not heard since I left our Welsh hills. Let us call the others."

At the sound of their voices the gleeman looked up. Thrusting his bow into his belt he made as if to go. But one of the archers stopped him.

"'Tis lonely here in this desert place." he said. "Will you not sing us another song?"

But the gleeman made no sign that he understood. Pulling the bow from his belt the archer thrust it into his hand, and by signs endeavoured to convey his meaning. At last the gleeman seemed to understand, and drew his bow across the brass strings.

"Ah, Robert," said the archer to his companion, "what can be the danger if we bring this minstrel within the camp? Stout Raymond would hardly object."

"He might not," said the other. "In truth he loves music. Still, he might not approve of such a breach of orders. But we will bring this minstrel a prisoner to him."

Seizing the gleeman by the arms they led him within the stockade. Hurrying their prisoner into the tent where Raymond le Gros sat with his brother knights they related how they had found him.

"So," exclaimed the knight, "he sings!"

"Ah, noble sir," replied the archer. "With such sweetness as I have rarely heard."

"Good," said the knight. "Minstrel let us hear your voice."

The gleeman made no movement to obey, but gazed stolidly before him. Impatiently Raymond le Gros turned to one of his companions.

"Good Hervey," he exclaimed. "Have we anyone who can make this wandering clown understand?"

"Unless it be Richard Ferrand, who has traded much with those Irish, I know not," replied Hervey.

"Ah! you are right. I had not thought of him," cried the knight. "Go you, Robert," to one of the archers, "and bring him hither."

Richard Ferrand soon explained to the gleeman the wishes of his leader. Seating himself, the gleeman began to sing. Silently the knights sat listening, and when he had done shouted aloud their approval.

"Let him remain," cried Hervey de Montmaurice. "Since I came into this savage country I have not heard such a song."

"Ay, let him stay," said the others. "'Tis but seldom we have music."

"Archers," said the stout Raymond, turning to the waiting men, "you have made a fortunate capture. This minstrel will rouse our spirits."

"Ay, he will," muttered one of the archers discontentedly. "But he wont rouse ours."

"We will hear little of his music, I fear," remarked the second archer when they had passed out of the tent.

"No," replied the other. "I wish we had left the clown outside."

As soon as they had gone Raymond turned to Richard Ferrand.

"Question this minstrel," he said. "Find out who he is and whence he comes."

But to all the questions of the man-at-arms the gleeman only gave back vacant stares, or a grin which showed his white teeth. At last Ferrand turned to the knight.

"Indeed, Sir Raymond, I can make nothing of this singer. He seems to be some witless vagabond who wanders up and down the country. His answers, you can see what they are. But that we have heard his voice I would say he had no tongue. Where he comes from I know not. He does not know himself. Some wandering man of motley whose senses seem to wander as much as his feet."

"Good," said Raymond. "What say you, comrades? We will make the night pleasant by the talent of this gleeman."

A close observer might have noticed a flash in the eyes of the gleeman, standing so quietly and impassively, which hardly betokened want of intelligence. But no one noticed, and he was again the poor, witless loon he appeared to be.

Seated amidst the knights he exerted himself to his full bent to entertain them. Song followed song till far into the night. Though he might be a witless wanderer he had talent of the best. To the knights, weary and jaded, he was of more value than the richest prey of cattle. Cattle were to be had for the taking, not such a songster as this. And so, quaffing their wine, the Anglo-Normans sat listening to the sweet-stringed tiompan and the resonance of the musical branch of the gleeman. Many snatches of conversation reached his ears. The knights spoke with unguarded tongues. What was to be feared from this poor loon! Why, at the present moment his head was nodding and his eyes closed.

"Raymond," exclaimed one of the knights, "what is the reason for the delay in the attack on the rich city of Waterford? It is not wont for us to leave such a prize unsought for."

"Nor will we leave it much longer," replied Raymond, "I have tarried here so long to give the Earl Richard, who sent me, time to prepare. When bidding me farewell at Milford the noble earl used those words: 'Go, good Raymond. Strengthen your position in some place on the sea-coast which will be easy of access. Tarry there till my coming. Ere the calends of September shall have passed I will be with you.' Hence I have tarried. The ides of August have passed, and the calends of September are with us. He will soon be here. A week ago I received a message from a Welsh merchant who came to trade, that the earl

was preparing a force of about fifteen hundred men at Milford. The time then is ripe to strike. Soon we will plant our banners before the walls of yonder city."

The eyes of the nodding gleeman opened for an instant, but shut again.

"Ah," he murmured to himself, "so it shall be war. Sitric was right then. My enterprise is turning out well. But I must be cautious. I may hear more." And he lay back in his seat and let out a great snore.

"Our minstrel's sleeping music is hardly so pleasing as that of his waking hours," remarked Hervey de Montmaurice with a loud laugh.

"'Tis not," replied Raymond le Gros. "But let him sleep. He can do little harm here. We owe him something for the music he has given us. And it were well that we followed his example. A little sleep will prepare us for the work we have to do to-morrow. Comrades, at last the period of waiting is over. The fleet of the Earl Richard has been sighted. Before to-morrow's sun goes down our banners must be waving before the walls of yonder city. And now every knight to his tent. In a few hours the earl will be here. Till then, farewell."

One by one the voices of the departing knights died away, and Raymond le Gros was alone. Putting out the torch, which flamed on the table, he threw himself on a couch, and was soon fast asleep.

When the deep breathing of Raymond le Gros betokened that he slept, the eyes of the gleeman were opened cautiously.

"Now," he muttered, "now for escape. To remain longer would be useless. I have heard all I came to hear."

So saying, Cian MacMurrough, for in the painted face and varied motley of the gleeman the young adventurer had wrapped himself, dropped to the floor. Outside he could hear the crunching step of the

sentinel who watched before the tent. Gliding softly on all fours he moved towards the door. But he had forgotten his tinkling bells. Unloosed from his belt they fell clattering to the ground. Instantly Cian stretched himself out. And it was well for him that he did so. The flap of the tent was raised, and the helmeted head of the sentry was pushed through. Anxiously he gazed round. Nothing was stirring. No sound disturbed the silence now, save the voice of his commander muttering in his sleep, disturbed, perhaps, by the bells' tinkle. For several seconds the sentinel remained gazing into the darkness. Then reassured, he dropped the flap with a grunt of satisfaction, and resumed his tramp.

"Holy Moling," muttered Cian. "That was a close call. Another second and Cian MacMurrough's race was run. Musical instruments are bad companions at such a time as this. I will rid myself also of my tiompan."

And he pushed it in under a pile of horse trappings.

"Now for another venture."

Forward he crept again. He knew by the sound of the footsteps that the sentry had moved away from the doorway. But he did not mean to escape by that road. He would attempt it at the side farthest away. Creeping underneath the stout canvas he was in the open air. But the biggest part of his task lay before him. If he could escape such sentries as were within the enclosure he had still to scale the walls. Standing erect he endeavoured to locate other watchers. He saw how slender was his chance as he perceived the pale moon-rays glinting on the lances of several others. Unless he could find other means he feared he was lost.

Ha! the sleeping knight. Could he procure his helmet and cloak there might be a means yet! In the moonlight he might be mistaken for the stout Raymond. Raising up the canvas he crept into the tent again.

Assuring himself that the knight still slept he crept towards the place where he had seen him place his helmet and cloak. Groping about he quickly found them. Hastily donning the steel cap he wrapped the cloak closely round him. He reflected that his triubhas might betray him, but he should chance that. The knight's ample mantle might hide it. Casting a hurried glance in the direction of the sleeping knight he raised the flap and stepped boldly into the open air once more.

The first step was successful. The sentry had no suspicions. Raising his spear he saluted. Successfully he passed the other sentries. But the difficulty of the gate was still before him. He feared to risk a call to the sentries to open it. The order of their commander to open at such an hour could hardly be a very usual happening. No, he would chance the climbing of the rough walls. Selecting a spot where they seemed to offer good purchase for climbing, he cast a glance all round. He was out of sight of the sentries, and could only see the tops of the tents gleaming out. He would chance it now.

Ridding himself of the cloak and helmet, which would now be only an encumbrance, he commenced to climb. To his mind, working at fever pitch, it seemed to be an age till his fingers gripped the top. Cautiously he raised himself, and peeped over. He could see no one. With an effort he drew himself up, and sitting astride looked around.

"Free, free," he whispered to himself. "Yonder lies the way to Waterford."

But a yell rang out. One of the sentries had wheeled round the corner. Outlined in the bright moonlight he beheld Cian. With his spear lowered at the charge he dashed forward. And the quondam gleeman heard the answering shout of his fellow-sentry. There was little use for concealment or caution now. Cian knew he must act. Swinging himself over the wall he dropped

to the ground. The sentry was almost upon him. Leaping aside, the active young Gaedheal tripped him. Seizing the spear which had fallen from the nerveless grip of the fallen foeman he turned to meet the other. With a rush he came on. But he was no match at spearplay for the conqueror of Tailltean. With a frightful thrust Cian sent the heavy spear crashing through the padded leathern jerkin of the soldier. With a groan the unfortunate sentry fell lifeless to the ground.

Meanwhile the other had gained his feet, and rushed at the young Gaehheal, undaunted by the fate of his companion. With his spear, Cian parried the strokes of his long sword. But time was passing. The camp was aroused, and Cian could hear the sound of many feet rushing towards the gate. He must make haste. Suddenly he gave way, and dropped his spear point. With a shout of triumph the marcher sprang at him, his sword upraised. Opportunity was with Cian. His enemy was uncovered. With unerring aim he crashed his spear through the bare throat of the foeman.

Even still it was a very narrow chance, for the gate had been flung open, and scarcely a hundred yards away knight and bowman came rushing madly towards him.

"Faire! MacMurrough Abu!" pealed the voice of Cian. "Follow me who can."

Away he sprang, racing towards the friendly shelter of rock and tree distant about six hundred yards. After him streamed the enemy, but the swift son of Murrough seemed to fly over the ground. By a miracle he escaped the flght of arrows which sang through the air, and then—the goal was won. Amongst the thickets and tortuous windings of the woodland he was safe. Well the Anglo-Normans knew that it was a useless task to pursue. Fuming and cursing they returned to their camp, carrying with them the bodies of their unfortunate sentries.

Hot with anger, and filled with the lust for vengeance,

was the party of knights which stood some time afterwards in the tent of Raymond le Gros looking down at the helmet and cloak which had been placed on the table beside the little bellbranch and tiompan of the gleeman. With glowering eyes they regarded the instruments of their discomfiture.

"So," growled the yellow-haired Raymond, lifting up the tiompan, "that cursed knave was not such a fool as he looked. He knew more than music."

"Ay," assented Hervey de Montmaurice, dryly. "He knew how to use the spear also. But, comrades, we will revenge ourselves at Waterford."

Meanwhile Cian was speeding on his way. As the sun-rays peeped out he answered the challenge of the watcher at St. Catherine's Gate. In a few seconds he was closeted with O'Faolain and Sitric.

"Prepare you, O'Faolain," he cried. "Before the evening sun has sunk beneath the sea our enemies will be here, and they come not alone. A leader whom they call Earl Richard is hastening to their aid with fifteen hundred men. He will join them to-day. Spare no man from the defence, for the attack will be bitter."

"Brave Cian," cried O'Faolain, when he had heard a full account of the adventure, as he gazed at the fantastic figure before him. "Your motley garb has served us well. Such a gallant gleeman I have seldom seen. Your escape will not be so pleasing to yonder foreigners as your music. But enough. When these enemies have been driven back we will speak further of this matter. You have deserved well at our hands. Is it not so, good Sitric?" and he turned to the Ostman, who had been silently listening.

"You are right," replied Sitric. "Seldom have I heard of such a gallant deed."

Alas, and alas for the hopes of man!

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE SWORD'S POINT

The morning of the 25th of August had dawned. A small group was standing on the battlemented roof of the Tower of Reginald. Shading their eyes from the blazing sun they looked out over the country. In the group were Raghnall O'Faolain, Malachi his son, Sitric, and Cian MacMurrough.

"Ha!" suddenly exclaimed Raghnall, pointing away towards the east. "Yonder come the foreigners. They have not tarried long."

All eyes followed his pointing finger. Away out beyond they beheld a large force advancing towards the city, their pennons fluttering gaily, the morning sun dancing on their bright armour and lances.

"Ho!" shouted Raghnall to the castellan, who hovered near. "Hang out the red buckler over our walls. When the enemy comes let him find us ready."

"Ay," muttered Sitric. "He'll find us ready. Everything is prepared. The waiting is at an end."

"Pray God that He may fight with us," cried Cian. "It will need all our strength to hurl back yonder force. Ha! I know that horseman. Behold, there rides the friend whom I entertained last night with my music beyond at Dundonolf, the stout Raymond. And many a word of praise he had for me. Mark ye his stout form and yellow hair."

"Ay, a sturdy-looking soldier, in truth," returned Raghnall. "But who is the tall knight who rides beside him? I doubt not he is the leader, for see they seem to consult him in everything. There goes a soldier from his side," and he pointed towards a man-at-arms

who had ridden away from the knight's side back along the line of the column.

Had Raghnall known, he gazed on no less a person than Strongbow, who having combined forces with Raymond le Gros, was marching to the assault. Raghnall turned to his friends.

"Away," he cried, "to your posts. The enemy draws near. Yonder at the Tower of Turgesius and the walls adjacent, you, Cian MacMurrough, will take your place by the side of Torgil. You, Malachi, will command at the castle of Magnus and the surrounding walls. You, Sitric," and he addressed the old Dane, "you will stay here with me. My friends, it behoves brave men to be prepared for whatever fate may have in store. Our walls are old, and before us we have a determined and well-armed enemy. The towers will be your place of refuge if forced from the walls, but if the worst should come, which Heaven forbid, do you fight your way here if possible. In this, the best and strongest of our towers, we will defend our patrimony to the last."

Gripping the hand of the chief in a tight clasp, they hurried away. Many a foreigner would bite the dust ere the worst of which he had spoken should come.

It was close to midday when the forces of Strongbow made their first attack on the city walls. But, though they struggled madly to gain a footing, they were forced back, leaving behind them dead and wounded men in plenty. After a short pause they came on again, and then the burghers put forward their strongest efforts to push back their assailants. Down from the walls hurtled beams and stones. From the towers poured streams of boiling tar and lead, tallow and water, which burned and scorched frightfully. Such of the enemy as had clambered to the top of the walls up their scaling ladders, fell back beneath the cleaving axes and swords of the defenders.

Encouraging their men to the fight, Torgil and his

young companion fought shoulder to shoulder. The war-cry of the young MacMurrough pealed above the clamour. His sword flashed everywhere. Madly he shouted to his men to cast down their burning, scorching lead, as he drove his sword home through leathern jerkin and cleft through iron helmet. Above the tumult rang the screams of tortured men who had felt the searing lead or tallow poured from the towers by the burghers who, blackened with heat and smoke, seemed very devils incarnate, as they rushed to the embrasures of the tower to cast their scalding fluids down on the heads of knight and yeoman. In the fierce struggle the enemy suffered heavily, but the citizens also suffered. Wounded and dying men of attackers and attacked strewed the ground, but still the combat went on. At last, dismayed by the fury of the defence, the attackers drew back precipitately, followed by the defiant shouts of the defenders.

"Good Torgil," cried Cian, as he leaned against a buttress and wiped away the sweat which streamed down his cheeks. "If our walls hold we will put them flying."

"Ay, so we will," answered face-scarred Torgil, his voice hoarse from shouting, "an' they hold out these foreigners will have a different story to tell from that of Wexford. But I have avenged myself for that day," and he wiped the blood from his heavy battleaxe. "This brave axe of mine has cleft many a foeman's skull this day."

"I know it well," said Cian. "But they are brave men."

"Ay," replied Torgil, scowling. "Brave behind their steel coats and with their flying arrows. Be they brave, how much braver ours who fight with naked bodies?"

"Good Torgil," said Cian. "Far be it from me to cast any reflection on our burghers and kern, so prodigal of life and limb, who, all naked as they are, clad only

in their woollen ionars, rush against them. But true it is that we would fight all the better for steel coats and flying arrows. But there is little good talking of that now. We cannot change the things which are. The enemy is without our gates, and though our bodies be naked, we must not skrink aside. Young I am, 'tis true, but I would give much to possess an hundred men clad in steel like unto these foreigners."

"Ay, you may be right," growled Torgil, "but they be not braver than our men."

"Forgive me, good Torgil," said Cian, laying his hand on the Dane's arm. "Forgive me if I have said aught to hurt you. None but brave men would oppose themselves to men so much better armed than themselves. But it grieves me to see our valiant burghers and stout kern expose their unprotected breasts against men clad in such wise as these, to see their darts and spears glance uselessly from their steel coats and padded jerkins. To win against them we must, I fear me, adopt arms and iron coats like them."

"Scarred Torgil is too old a bird to change his plumage," said the Dane. "But, young warrior, I am glad I saved you beyond at Dundonolf."

Thus they conversed while the men around them carried away the wounded, or piled up heaps of missiles for the next onslaught of the Anglo-Normans. They were thus engaged when the sound of hewing axes rang on their ears. Surprised, and not a little alarmed, Cian and Torgil gazed around. For a time they could not make out where the sound came from. And then, oh, horror, they beheld a sight which caused their hearts to sink.

"Great God," shouted Cian, "we are lost. The wall is breached."

It was true. Attached to the walls outside hung a small wooden house which was supported on a stout wooden post. Beneath it were clustered a group of men in armour. Unnoticed, they had crept up, under

the leadership of Raymond le Gros, whose eagle eye had picked out the weak spot in the wall, and, now, hidden from view, they hewed away with lusty vigour. Even as Cian looked, the house, deprived of its support, gave a lurch forward. For a few seconds it rocked and swayed, then, with a crash, fell outwards, dragging with it a large portion of the wall.

"Forward men," shouted Cian. "To the breach."

To the breach sprang the burghers, hurling their darts, their slings whirling. But it was vain. Already the men-at-arms, clambering over the fallen house, had gained a foothold on the breach. Behind them came pouring supporters in overwhelming numbers. In vain the townsmen exposed themselves recklessly, hoping to stay the rush of steel-clad men. In vain they poured out their blood. In the mad melee, Torgil went down, his battle-axe broken and splintered. But he had sold his life dearly. Through casque and corselet his terrible weapon had crashed, and even as he lay, surrounded by five or six motionless forms, his long, bony fingers still clutched the throat of a foeman. Indeed, stout Torgil would not change his plumage now.

"The tower," shouted Cian, above the din. "To the tower."

'Twas little good. Already they were cut off from it. The stout door had been burst in, and the little band of men who held it were disputing its possession with the assailants.

Foiled, the desperate men took to the houses, which stood on either side. From them they kept up a stubborn fight. When forced from one they took possession of another, and thus disputed every inch of ground. But woollen ionars were not match for steel coats and padded jerkins. Slowly but surely the attackers won their way.

Meanwhile the fight was being carried on bitterly through the other portions of the town. Every street, every house, had become a centre of conflict. Dead

bodies of burghers and men-at-arms, kern and archer, were strewn everywhere. Blood ran in rivers. Enraged by the stubborn resistance, the Anglo-Normans slaughtered combatant and non-combatant. They slew and spared not.

Forced from the houses, some of which they set on fire, the citizens who were still able to bear arms concentrated on the Tower of Reginald. Into it they swarmed as the place where the last act in the bloody drama was to be enacted. There were gathered together—Raghnall O'Faolain, and Malachi his son, Sitric and Cian MacMurrough. Through the storm and strife they had come together again. How prophetic had been the words of Raghnall in the morning: "If the worst should come, do you fight your way here." And now they had come.

It was a saddened company who gathered around the chief. They knew that the end was near. The back of the defence was broken. The foreigners roved through the city at will. Outside in the streets lay the bodies of slaughtered kinsmen. The shrieks of maddened, outraged women rent the air. A lull in the fighting had come. As if to make their onslaught more telling the enemy had drawn back from the Tower of Reginald.

"Chief," spoke up a grey-haired old merchant, "outside in the streets lie my two gallant sons, who died, their faces to the foe. My poor wife and golden-haired daughter have fallen 'neath the spears of these devils. Naught remains for me now, alone in the world, save to die with arms in my hands avenging them."

"Ay," broke out a burly blacksmith, who grasped a ponderous sledge-hammer in his hand. "We all have wives and children to avenge."

"Away to the defence," cried Raghnall. "Strengthen yonder door with beams. Barricade the stairway with whatever you may find. Let death belch from every

floor and loop and window. These foreigners shall remember the Tower of Reginald."

Hastily beams were piled against the great oaken door. At the turnings of the narrow stairway rough barricades were thrown up. Behind the battlements watched stern, fierced-eyed men.

"MacMurrough," it was the chief, Raghnall O'Faolain, who spoke in Cian's ear, as he drew him aside. "I fear the end is near. Our walls were less stout than the hearts of our men. But what of Torgil? I do not see him here."

"Yonder by the Tower of Turgesius he lies," replied Cian sadly. "He died fighting as he wished to die."

"Ah, it is a sad day for us," said Raghnall. "How many of us shall see its close?"

"I care not," cried Cian. "But hark to the enemy."

From the street below sounded loud blows on the oaken door. But it withstood them stoutly.

"Now, my friends," shouted Raghnall, "strike!"

"MacMurrough Abu!" yelled Cian, jumping ahead to assist at the dragging forward of a huge beam which was being pushed over. Downwards it shot, carrying destruction into the crowd of yeomen who were battering at the door. But now the arrows began to whizz through the air, and men began to fall.

"Back! back!" roared Cian. "Take shelter. Let no head be seen."

Across the roof came staggering the burly blacksmith, bearing a huge stone.

"Comrades, we will send them a welcome messenger," he shouted, laughing wildly.

And over the battlements he cast his "messenger," which carried death to many beneath. But an arrow whizzed through the air. With a wild cry the blacksmith leaped out into space, the feathered shaft buried in his bosom. Thus the fight went on. At bay, knowing they had no mercy to expect, the townsmen fought like tigers. Their oaken door held out

bravely. Planting their ladders, the attackers tried the escalade. But the garrison hurled down their ladders, and groaning, dying, the escaladers were borne away.

Now, from the shelter of the closer houses, the defenders caught sight of a party of mail-clad men-at-arms rushing across the intervening space, bearing in their hands blazing torches. To the door they ran and flung their torches amongst the heap of furniture, tapestries, and hangings, which they had piled up.

"They are burning down the door," shouted Cian. "Now, men, down with your stones."

"To the rescue," yelled Raghnall, casting a large stone.

At the crevelles the garrison stood exposed. Many of them fell victims to the arrows of the ever-watchful archers, but the crushed and bleeding corses strewn below showed how they had avenged themselves. But a dense column of smoke rose up. The inflammable materials had caught fire. Above the roaring of the flames, and the loud crackling, rang out the triumphant savage cries of the enemy, who had drawn back to allow the devouring fire to do its work.

"This is the end," muttered Cian, as he gazed round on the little garrison, now so sadly reduced. Not more than a score still held themselves erect. But there was no sign of weakening in their grim countenances.

A crash came, followed by an upleap of flying sparks.

"The door is down," cried Cian.

"To the stairs," yelled out Raghnall. "Dispute every step. Remember, comrades, we fight to the last."

Down the stairway they dashed to the aid of the few who watched below. In through the smoke dashed the enemy, and the lofty hall became a scene of wildest fighting. Groans of dying men, the ring of steel on steel, the crunch of battle-axe, and lance, and sword, through bone and sinew, intermingled in a hellish

medley. And over all hung the thick pall of smoke from the still burning door.

Forced back by the rush, the defenders retired up the narrow stairway, which grew slippery with blood. Literally the burghers had interpreted the command of Raghnall. Every step became a miniature battlefield. But ever upwards were forced the townsmen. Numbers and superior arms pressed them back.

Like a veritable demon, Cian smote down the enemy. With a formidable battle-axe he fought. His Tailltean sword crashing through helmet and brain of a Welsh man-at-arms, had been splintered to atoms. Loudly his voice rang amid the din. At every twist in the stairway he rallied the ever-diminishing burghers. By his side fought the two O'Faolains and the Danish Sitric, with two or three others. The others—their bodies littered the stair and hallway.

Ensconced behind a barricade at a turning in the stairs they stood. A rush of the enemy came, but they reeled back before the biting steel of the gallant few. Alas! three had fallen. Four yet remained.

"Come," whispered Cian to his companions. "The end draws near. In yonder room we will meet it."

With a bound they were in the little chamber, and barricaded the door. The four survivors embraced each other.

"See, comrades," cried Raghnall O'Faolain, pointing through a loophole, "yonder the sun is setting, like to the sun of our lives."

"Ay," said Cian, looking away at the golden gleams. "The span of our lives is sped. We shall soon follow its golden track out into the Beyond."

"What matters it?" muttered Sitric to himself. "Our duty is done. Ill fortune has fallen upon us. We will not survive it."

Outside the enemy flung themselves against the door. Soon it yielded to the rain of blows, and yeomen and men-at-arms sprang across it. The foremost fell back

lifeless before the strokes of the doomed men. But they swept the comrades from their feet. Before the lances of the knights the Danish Sitric went down, blood spurting from the wounds which pierced his gallant breast. Side by side lay the O'Faolains, senseless and bleeding. Still, his teeth set grimly, Cian MacMurrough plied his battle-axe savagely. He was surrounded. Struck with a mace, he staggered, tried to recover, then, with a wild cry of defiance, fell prostrate across the bodies of his companions-in-arms. And through the loophole a last golden gleam of the departing sun threw its beams across the bloody faces. Mayhap, it wished to glorify the end of the last remnant of the defenders of the Tower of Reginald.

"By my knightly sword," cried Raymond le Gros, "that was a gallant youth. Back," he shouted, striking up the sword of a man-at-arms who, noticing that life still remained in the body of Cian, had made a furious thrust at his defenceless breast. "Touch him not. 'Twere pity such a gallant should fall victim to a coward stroke."

"Ay, you say well, noble knight," quoth a hoarse voice beside him, "methinks I know that youth," and he peeped keenly into the face of the senseless Cian.

"Ah," he went on, "methought I knew him. He is the son of the man who ousted me, the false King of Leinster. My arrival has been most fortunate, most noble knight; we will preserve this youth for another fate."

"And who may you be that prate so loudly?" asked the Anglo-Norman, his grey eyes glinting with anger.

"I am he whom men call MacMurrough," replied the hoarse-voiced man, whom the knight now saw was very tall, and of large proportions. "I am he who rules the land of Leinster, to whose aid your leader, Richard of Pembroke, has hurried. To me, then, belongs this youth."

"I say no," cried Raymond. "Before the swords of my men these men have fallen. To me they belong."

"Say you so," sneered the other. "Your leader shall decide."

"Noble Earl," cried MacMurrough, turning towards a knight of tall stature, with ruddy complexion and freckled skin, his feminine-looking features lit up by a pair of grey eyes. "I claim the youth as my prisoner. This knight of yours disputes my right. What say you?"

"Raymond," said Strongbow, in a weak voice, which accorded but ill with his tall form. "What matters it; let the demand of the king in whose services we are prevail."

"To none other than yourself would I yield my claim, noble Earl," cried Raymond. "King of Leinster, I yield up my prisoner."

A triumphant smile passed over the face of Diarmuid. Turning to a couple of men he ordered them to remove Cian, who had not yet recovered consciousness, to an upper room, and he added:

"Guard him well. He will meet the fate of all those who oppose the will of MacMurrough."

Quickly Cian was borne away. In twos and threes the others left the apartment. Alone, MacMurrough gazed around on the ghastly scene.

"Ay," he muttered to himself, "my ambition is near its realization. With the swords of these foreigners I have brought my kingdom of Leinster back to its allegiance. Now the turn of Munster comes; soon I shall be able to strike for the throne of O'Connor."

But he started and glanced around. A groan had caught his ear.

"What was that? I thought no living person was near. Ha!" as he saw the eyes of Raghnall O'Faolain open, and his glance wander around. "Some of those townsmen have escaped the lances of my mercenaries. Ah, that is a matter soon settled! A dead enemy is less troublesome than a living one. Thus I will rid myself of him."

An evil smile wreathing his lips, MacMurrough drew his sgian. Kneeling, he raised his arm.

"Ay, strike, MacMurrough, traitor and confederate of foreigners," cried Raghnall, now fully conscious. "One crime more will hardly make heavier the guilt of MacMurrough."

"*A Dhia mhor*," cried MacMurrough, "that voice; I seem to know it, and yet. . ." he peered into the face of O'Faolain. Did it bring to his mind the memory of a foul deed arising out of the long distant past? Did it call up again that long-vanished day, now almost thirty years ago, when the blood-stained form of another O'Faolain lay before him, the treacherous steel of an assassin buried in his heart? Who shall say?

"No," he muttered to himself. "Great God! it may not be. First the father, now the son. No," casting the sgian from him, "my hands shall not be dyed in his blood."

O'Faolain had raised himself on his elbow, his eyes glaring defiance and bitter hate.

"Strike, MacMurrough!" he cried, his weak voice rising sibilantly. "Strike! Why do you hesitate? My noble father felt your treachery. Complete your work. The son lies powerless before you. Strike then, and quickly!"

"No," cried MacMurrough, violently. "Your death will not be laid to my charge. Do not tempt me, lest I forget that other day."

But the fiery outburst had been too much for the weakened frame. Again unconsciousness had seized O'Faolain. Loudly calling for assistance, MacMurrough ordered the wounds of the unfortunate chief and his son, who had been but wounded, to be bound up. When this had been done, and he was again alone, the royal traitor remained gazing down at O'Faolain with a look in which hate, fear, and baffled revenge struggled for the mastery.

"Ay, it shall be so," he muttered. "I will send these

O'Faolains from the town. . . . Would that it might be otherwise! But his father's blood seems to cry out against me. His spirit menaces. . . ." A look of terror crept into his eyes. He threw out his hands, as if to ward off some unseen presence. "Begone! Away from me, thou murdered spirit. No kindred blood of thine shall be shed by me. Away, away, thy bidding shall be done! Away, away!"

With a loud cry the traitor MacMurrough rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRISONER

When Cian MacMurrough returned to consciousness he found himself lying in a little room, outside which he could hear a measured step. Darkness had come, and high up on the wall he saw a white shaft of moonlight which entered through a small opening. For a long time Cian lay gazing up at the moonbeam. He had little inclination to move, as he felt weak and heavy. But slowly a glimmering of his position forced itself into his slowly working brain. He remembered the last desperate struggle in the Tower of Reginald, the blow which had deprived him of his senses, and then—no more. What had happened after that he knew not. But this could hardly be the tower where they had so grimly struggled, for the pale light of the moon revealed no sign of the struggle, no bodies of friend or foe. He remembered that the foreigners had won. Whatever place this was, it was not the house of a friend. His friends were broken and defeated. They were at the mercy of the ruthless foreigner. Friends would not have cast him into this bare apartment, and left him weak and untended.

Ah! what was that? He heard the turning of a key in the lock, and then, through the yellow glare of a torch which lighted up his prison, he saw three men enter. Too well he knew the tall, grey-bearded man, with cruel eyes, who stood before him. How much had happened since that fateful day, now more than twelve months ago, when his father, Morrough, and himself had looked forth from their hiding place at the march of the triumphant traitor away to welcome the

first foreigner. His other visitors were Anglo-Normans: one Raymond le Gros, the other he did not know.

The door clanged to, and the king and his companions stood gazing down at the prisoner. Diarmuid MacMurrough was the first to break the silence.

"Ah, nephew mine," he said banteringly, "you have recovered from your indisposition. How glad I am that you have recovered in time to honour us with your presence at our coming festivities. It would be very inhospitable, and not at all in accord with the open-handed generosity of MacMurrough, that you should languish here while the marriage of your cousin is being celebrated. I did not hope that a relative of mine would have graced our festival by his presence, but fate has been kind. This noble earl is to be the bridegroom," and he pointed to the unknown knight who stood beside him, bowing to the prisoner in acknowledgment of the strange introduction.

"Noble Earl," MacMurrough went on, "'tis but right that relatives should know each other. Before you behold my nephew, Cian MacMurrough, a brave youth, who has opposed you valiantly."

"Ay," muttered Raymond le Gros to himself, "he is a gallant youth. But I like not this."

Up to the present Cian had said nothing. To say that he was surprised by the apparent cordiality of his uncle would be to say little. He had heard of him that he was revengeful, implacable, hardly capable of forgiving an enemy. Could some miracle have happened, or might it be some cruel jest on the part of the renegade? But MacMurrough was speaking again.

"Noble Earl," he said, "this brave nephew of mine would, I fain would think, be delighted to be present. Is it not so, nephew mine?"

"I am your prisoner," replied Cian. "The marriage of your daughter with this foreigner concerns me not."

"Ah, nephew," replied MacMurrough, "but it con-

cerns me much. I have decided that you shall be present, and you shall."

"You have the power, King," said Cian. A wild hope had sprung up. This strange decision might give him a chance to escape.

As if he knew what was passing in his mind, Diarmuid went on:

"But we like your company too well to wish that you should leave us. My clansmen will attend all your wants during the festivities. They will be at your heels. And, now, my friends, that my nephew has consented so prettily, we will go. There is much to be attended to."

When the others had withdrawn, Diarmuid turned back to Cian.

"No, my loved nephew," he sneered. "I like your company too well to permit you to go. If you have any hope of escape put it aside. My guest you will be at this marriage feast, though an unwilling one. A strange whim, no doubt, but build no hope on it. Your every step will be watched. Abandon any hope of escaping the vengeance of MacMurrough. Already the withe is being prepared for your pretty throat. Meanwhile eat, drink your fill. You will not long enjoy the hospitality of your uncle, nephew mine."

He laughed hoarsely, and then the clanging of the door told Cian he had gone.

The thoughts of Cian were hardly pleasant as he lay there listening to the retreating footsteps. He had expected nothing but death, but he had hoped to meet it sword in hand as befitted a warrior. He had not expected to be compelled to endure such bitterness as this; dragged to the feast of his captor to look on all the merrymaking which would mark it, and then to submit himself to the hands of the executioner on the morrow. The sardonic jest, he knew, appealed to the nature of the traitor MacMurrough, and would be carried through in its every detail. And then his hand

fell to his girdle. Why not end it all? Why not rob the renegade of his enjoyment? But he thrust the thought from him. If it were fated to him to die at the hands of the executioner, he would go to his death with a smile on his lips as became a MacMurrough. His uncle should not see him shrink. But, perhaps, God would be kind, and He might open some way to escape.

The re-opening of the door broke in on his musings. For an instant he thought his unwelcome visitors had returned, but it was only a clansman who came with food and drink. He thought of refusing it, but it would be little use to let his strength go. When he had eaten, the clansman, who had not quitted the chamber, told him to prepare for departure.

"Why should I leave this place?" asked Cian, more for the purpose of gaining information than from any desire to resist. He knew its uselessness.

"Our noble king has ordered your removal to the house of Brodar, the wine merchant, where his daughter, the Princess Eva, is lodged," replied the clansman.

The blood rushed to Cian's face as he heard the familiar name. The house of Brodar, the wine-merchant. That house where he had spent so many weeks. Surely some kind fate was working on his behalf. But he carefully concealed his joy from the sharp eye of the clansman.

His elation was short-lived. In his new prison he found that the guards who watched him had been changed. Before it had been the clansmen of Hy Kinsella, many of whom had known him in the days when his father ruled at Fearna. Now this had been changed, and only foreigners watched. No doubt Diarmuid had taken alarm.

"But I'll foil him yet," muttered Cian through his teeth.

Further than strict confinement to his room, which

was closely guarded, no other restraint was placed on his liberty. Pacing up and down his prison he listened to the bustle of preparation for the marriage of the unhappy girl who was being bartered away to further her father's ambition. Thus the night crept on.

. . . . . .

It was approaching morning. Already the dawn was filling the room with a misty light, when Cian awoke. He had fallen into a light slumber, but now the sound of a key rattling in the heavy lock caused him to start up from the couch on which he was reclining. In the dim, shadowy light he saw a female form enter.

"Hush!" whispered a low, sweet voice. "Do not speak too loudly."

"Who are you?" demanded Cian, advancing towards the visitor.

"One more wretched than yourself, who hopes to undo some of the evil which her father has accomplished. I am your cousin, Eva, so soon to be sacrificed a victim to this unholy alliance. I have heard of this cruel jest. My father boasted of it to me. He promised that as soon as the ceremony was over you would be allowed to depart. But, alas, I can place but little reliance on his word."

"Neither may you, fair cousin," said Cian grimly. "The withe is being prepared for my neck."

The girl uttered an exclamation of horror.

"O kind God," cried she, "that such things can be. He is false to you as he is to me."

"Forgive me," said Cian gently, laying his hand on her arm, "if I have pained you. Rather the withe a thousand times than that such should be the case. But the expression escaped me involuntarily."

"No, no," she whispered feverishly. "This cannot be. I have come here unknown to my father. I possess

power with these foreigners," she laughed bitterly, "and the Earl Richard has ordered that I be admitted at any time. During the banquet, which will follow this hateful marriage, I will send a maiden to you. Do whatever she bids you. I will have instructed her. Be you gay, light-hearted, during the feast, for many eyes will be upon you. I must go now, or they will wonder at my absence, and, oh, my cousin, when people speak harshly of the Princess Eva, give a kindly thought to one who is wretched." Her voice broke, and bitter sobs shook her slender form.

"Princess—my cousin," broke out Cian, pained by her distress. "Be your effort on my behalf successful or unsuccessful, my kindliest thoughts shall ever be thine. But why not fly from this man?"

"Ah, that I could!" she sobbed. Then, drying her tears, she went on: "But fate cries out against it. I have struggled. I have prayed that this thing might not be, but my father is implacable. To all my pleadings he turns a deaf ear. He is adamant. He demands that I drink this bitter cup. 'Tis useless to resist. I have ceased to struggle." Her voice had assumed a lifeless, hopeless tone. "I have bowed to untoward fate. You, my cousin, speak of flight. But my comings and goings are watched. My every word taken note of. Think you that my father would shrink from it? But, mayhap, he thinks he is securing my future." Again she laughed bitterly.

"Surely," exclaimed Cian, his heart hot within him at the fate of his unhappy cousin, "there is some means of escape."

"I can see none," said the sweet hopeless voice. "No. For the hostage destined to secure this foreign earl's aid there is no escape. But I weary you with my tears and complainings. I have been unmaidenly in thus unbosoming myself."

"Never unmaidenly, sweet, unfortunate cousin," exclaimed Cian. "Could I by the sacrifice of my life

secure your happiness, how gladly I would lay it down."

"Do not speak so," she cried, laying her hand on his arm. "None can help me. But I must go. To stay longer would be to ruin all. You will remember."

"I will remember the kindest, fairest MacMurrough who breathes," cried Cian, pressing a kiss of full passion and reverence on the fair hand which lay on his arm.

With a sad, hopeless smile lighting up her wan face she was gone.

CHAPTER XV

OUT OF THE TOILS

The Church of the Blessed Trinity was filled to overflowing. Citizens eager to placate the conqueror, anxious to disarm his vengeance by their presence at the marriage of his daughter with the chief of the foreign mercenaries, were there. Well they knew that their absence would be visited with heavy punishment. Amongst them, their swords and spears still reeking with the blood of the slaughtered townsmen, moved soldiers, their breaths heavy with the fumes of the wine and ale with which they had gorged themselves in their last night's orgies. They watched for the sign of hostile movement on the part of the burghers, but none came. Cowed and dispirited the people looked on listlessly.

From the altar rails a brilliant procession was moving towards the door. The words had just been said which consummated the union of the Princess Eva with the Welsh adventurer, Strongbow. With a smile of triumph lighting up his freckled features, the chief of the foreigners walks down the aisle, his bride, the hue of death on her beautiful face, beside him. Behind the bridal pair comes the traitor MacMurrough. No thought of the misery of his fair, unhappy daughter seems to oppress him. No thought of the ruin and havoc which his evil passions have wrought. Calm, triumphant, he strides along, a very God of Destruction, this white-haired man of eighty, the people cowering before the glances which he cast from side to side. Some cheers ring out as the procession proceeds towards the house of Brodar, where the wedding

banquet is spread, but they come from those who, at all such times, either in cringing servility or the desire for favour, worship at the shrine of the rising sun, even though it be typified by a merciless blood-stained traitor. But mostly sullen silence reigns, broken every now and again by the lamentations and shrieks of women who mourn their slaughtered kin. Men mutter in their throats curses on the tyrant which they dare not utter aloud. Thus the bridal party passes between the heaps of still unburied dead, and the lines of sullen, glowering people.

Close to the wedded pair walks Cian MacMurrough. Alone among the party which girds him round he bears no arms. But he holds his head proudly, seems to have little thought of the fate which awaits him. He might have dared all on a sudden dash, but the words of the princess have given him hope. He will wait. Even though her brave effort may fail, he will never die tamely. If the worst comes he will seize a sword from one of his captors, and die fighting. He will never die with the withe round his throat. So he waits.

All day the banquet proceeded merrily. No shadow of the terrible events of the previous day clouded it. In the midst of the guests sat Cian. His uncle had carried out his threat to the letter. Sitting there the captive seemed to be gloating over his own ruin. But no one would guess the tumult which raged in his heart.

Now the candles have been lit. Suddenly Cian started, for a maiden had left the side of the princess. Fearful of attracting undue notice, Cian watched her make her way down the room. He knew the prying eyes which watched him. Slowly the girl approached. With a curious feeling Cian watched her. Now that the time had come he dwelt not so much on the possibility of success as on the appearance of her whom he felt was to be his deliverer. He marked the golden hair, plaited into two great braids, which fell far below her waist, noted the gauzy veil which floated from the

glittering minn which crowned her white brow; feasted his eyes on the beauty of her face. Then, recalled to himself, he cast a furtive glance at the warrior who sat beside him, but apparently he had not noticed anything. The girl had halted beside him.

"Noble youth," she said, "I bear you a message from the Princess Eva."

"I await your pleasure, fair lady," replied Cian. "What message do you bring from my fair cousin?"

"She bids you come to her," replied the girl. "You will accompany me."

"I am at your service," replied Cian, rising from his seat.

Approaching the head of the table he stood bowing to the princess.

"Ah, my cousin," bantered the princess, who seemed to have cast aside the gloom of the night before. "So you have come. And was it necessary that I should send a messenger? Cousins are not wont to be so distant."

"Ah, fair lady," said Cian, falling in with her humour, "'twas not my desire to appear distant. But to the queen of all this throng how shall a poor subject force his way?"

A shadow seemed to cross her face. For an instant the sad, pensive look came into her eyes. Then she was herself again.

"Ah, my noble cousin, you would excuse yourself. But you are forgiven. Let us to business. I have need of someone who will accompany this lady to a house where a poor clansman lies wounded. It lies close by the city walls. You will not be detained long. Will you go?"

"Your bidding, fair cousin," replied Cian, "is to me a law."

"It is settled, then," said the princess, smiling. "Ciara will see to all. And take care that you return as speedily as possible."

But her father, who sat at her left hand, looked up, a frown on his face.

"Cannot someone else go?" he queried. "Raymond here, or why send at all? Cannot this business wait till morning?"

"No; the morning may be too late. On my wedding night I will not forget my friends," replied the princess. "Who more suitable than my cousin? Besides, he will be a more suitable companion for Ciara than those foreigners, who could not address a single word to her."

"I will not let him go," cried MacMurrough.

"And will you forbid me such a whim on this, my wedding night?" she asked, scorn in her voice.

"Let him go, then," cried MacMurrough. And he muttered: "What matter is it? He cannot escape. It is only a few hours now till the withe will be round his throat."

With glowering eye he watched the tall form of Cian and his fair companion disappear. After a few moments he arose, and calling a tall kern to him, bade him keep the pair in sight.

As soon as Cian and his companion had passed into the narrow street, the girl spoke in a low tone.

"Noble MacMurrough," she said, "you understand the reason we have come on this journey. The princess has told me all, and has asked my assistance, for she could not carry through such a scheme unaided. This visit is but a blind to take you out of the reach of prying eyes. We are, no doubt, going to the bedside of a wounded man, but it could have waited. The delivery of messages to you would have been too dangerous to attempt. Of course she might have visited you in your prison, but that would have aroused dangerous attention. You will see, then, the necessity for this plan."

"Fair lady," said Cian, "none knows better than myself what the princess is attempting. But I would much rather that I should perish, or make the attempt myself, than that either of you should run such risk."

"Ah, there speaks foolish pride," rallied the fair conspirator. "What greater pleasure could you give our poor Eva than the knowledge that she had helped her kinsman? As to me, it is not worth while to speak of the risk. Naught would please me better than to defeat the schemes of our black-browed king. Young man, speak not again of our danger. Think only of your own."

"I shall not offend again, fair lady," said Cian, amused in spite of himself by the tone of authority in which the last words were uttered. "But may I inquire the name of my fair aider?"

"Ah, young man, you grow bold," and her merry laugh rang through the silent street. "I know not if I will satisfy your idle curiosity. You," she whispered, "who stand in such peril to be interested in my name."

"I have known little else than peril for months past," replied Cian. "I would fain know the name of the lady who risks so much for me."

"Not for you; not for you," she whispered back. "In truth for Eva."

"But I am to be the gainer," said Cian. "Fair lady, allow my contention."

"Well, then, have it so," said Ciara. "My name—ah, noble youth, I will not satisfy your curiosity. But do not be so solemn. Laugh, jest, talk nonsense. Spies may be about. But to my message. When you return to the banqueting hall request permission to retire from the princess. Do not do it at once; that might arouse suspicions. Await a suitable opportunity. But be you certain the king is present. The Princess Eva will grant your request. Proceed then to your room at once. Sleep, or pretend to sleep. The watch will not be very close. I will go to you as soon as possible.

"And yet you risk naught for me?" whispered Cian.

"For you, naught. For Eva, everything," she answered saucily. "But here we are. Now, not a word."

Their task completed they hurried back to the ban-

quet, and Cian possessed his soul in patience till he thought a sufficient time had elapsed. Impatiently he awaited the moment. Then approaching the princess, he proferred his request. She looked up with well-feigned surprise.

"Ah, weary so soon of our festivities," she rallied. "Go, then. I can refuse no request to-night."

He felt her hand tremble as he raised it to his lips. The fervour of his kiss conveyed to her his gratitude and respect.

In his room he threw himself on his couch, but not to sleep. Now that the time had come he feared. It all appeared so simple that he could hardly imagine the thing would be successful. To him, listening there in the silence, came the sounds of revelry from the room he had just left. Every minute seemed an hour, till at last the door was cautiously pushed in, and his fair companion of a few hours before stood before him.

"Are you ready?" she whispered. "Now is the time, for no sentinel guards your door."

Hardly were the words uttered than a step sounded outside.

"Kind God!" she breathed. "We are undone."

"Hush!" whispered Cian. "All may yet be well. Did he see you enter?"

"No," she replied. "There was no one on guard as I entered."

"Then my kind uncle is fearful for my safety," said Cian in her ear. "But hide here behind the door. I will call him in. You will not shrink from the sight of a little roughness?"

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" she whispered vehemently. "If you have a plan carry it out. This thing may mean ruin. We built all on the absence of the sentinel."

"I can but try," said Cian. "Conceal yourself where you will not be seen. Do not cry out at anything you may see."

Cian went to the door and opened it. Outside in the

gloom he saw a kern, the same whom Diarmuid had sent to spy on them from the banquet.

"Sentinel," he said in a low voice, "I wish a message to be brought to the Princess Eva, but I have no light to write it by. No doubt, you can supply me with a spark to light my candle, for I see your tinder bag at your belt."

"Ay," replied the clansman, unhooking his kindling gear. "You can use this."

Nonplussed, Cian took the bag. He should entice him in by other means.

"Meanwhile," he went on, "this is a night of festivity. A poor prisoner, I have little to offer, but some generous mead has been sent to me. Come! It awaits thee."

With a muttered word of thanks the unsuspecting clansman stepped across the threshold. But the hands of Cian closed round his throat in a vice-like grip, choking back the cry which rose to his lips. For a few seconds he struggled, then grew still.

"Is he dead?" whispered his companion, laying a trembling hand on his arm.

"No," said Cian, "but he will trouble no one for some time to come. We will make certain." And with strips of cloth torn from his cloak he bound the unconscious man's hands and feet, placing a gag in his mouth.

"Haste! Haste!" cried Ciara. "The Princess Eva wishes that you wrap yourself in this mantle, which belongs to the king, her father. You will then make your way to the gate of St. Catherine, close by the Church of the Blessed Trinity. There you will find a man. Whisper to him as you pass, 'Princess Eva.' He will answer, 'I await!' You may trust him in everything, for he is the princess's foster brother. Go now and God go with you."

"And you?" asked Cian. "May you not be connected with my escape?"

"Oh, why do you question?" she asked, wringing her hands. "I shall not be suspected, for I will be with the Princess. Haste, then, while there is yet time."

"Will not my protectress honour me with her name?" asked Cian, as he wrapped himself in the mantle, at the same time hanging the sword of the unconscious clansman to his girdle. "You will not send me forth in ignorance of the name of her to whom I owe my deliverance."

"Since it must be so—Ciara Ni Rian. But go. Already too much time has been lost. Go! Go!"

"Farewell, my fair protectress," cried Cian, seizing her hand, and impressing on it a grateful kiss. "Cian MacMurrough shall not forget."

She made no reply, but pushed him gently towards the door. As he stole down the dark stairway Cian could hear her merry laugh as she again entered the hall where the revellers were still making merry. Then the slamming of a heavy door shut it off from his hearing.

In the street he passed several groups of drunken soldiers. They paid him little attention, however. Some there were, indeed, who lurched towards him, but Cian walked on boldly. As he went along he thought how opportune an uprising would be now with discipline so lax. But little likelihood of that, he muttered bitterly. The citizens were sunk in grim despair. Ere long he found himself by the gate of St. Catherine, and then suddenly a shadowy form seemed to spring from the ground. Startled, Cian laid his hand on his sword, then remembered.

"'Princess Eva,'" he muttered lowly.

"'I await,'" replied the other, leading on at a rapid pace. Cian started as the call of a sentry fell on his ear. But his companion replied, and in a few seconds they stood beyond the walls.

"Now," said his guide, "my task is finished. In

yonder thicket," and he pointed away to where a clump of trees showed black in the darkness, "you will find a horse. Mount and tarry not in this place."

"I thank you, friend, for your brave help," said Cian.

"Do not thank me. Thank the Princess Eva," replied the guide, and disappeared into the darkness.

With little difficulty Cian found the horse, and mounting, urged him on through the night whither his inclination should lead him.

CHAPTER XVI

TREACHERY WINS

Within the walls of Dublin consternation reigned. As far as the eye could reach southwards nothing was to be seen save the tents and booths of the huge force led by Diarmuid MacMurrough against the city. Rapidly marching across the passes, he had successfully evaded the forces of the Ard-ri, Rory O'Connor, and sat down before the walls. The citizens feared the anger of the traitor, and well they might. Had they not killed his father, and then crowned their bloody deed by casting his body into a pit along with the carcase of a dead dog. Well they knew that Diarmuid had never forgotten the bitter insult. At the Thing-mote on Hoggen Green the Thing was hastily called together. Over the gathering presided the Dane, Hasculf Mac Torcaill, chief of the city. It was evident from the first that they had not war as their object.

"My brothers," cried Hasculf, standing before them, "the enemy is outside our walls, but we have no force to oppose him. We cannot hope to withstand such a multitude. Should we resist our lives will be forfeited, and our city laid in ashes, for we know what little reason MacMurrough has to love us. Let us then temporize. Let us submit for the present, till later, when more powerful and better prepared we may be able to cast out our enemies."

"Well spoken, noble Hasculf," spoke up an old merchant. "It would be little use to resist such a force as this seems to be. These English allies of MacMurrough's number well over four thousand men, so I have been informed, and he himself has a goodly following.

And, friends, we have the bloody example of Waterford before us, only three weeks ago. Do we want another Waterford here? Prudence must be our policy."

"Ospac is right," sounded the cries from all sides. "Let us surrender, as our prince suggests."

Some there were who wished for resistance, but their voices failed to carry conviction to the prudent ones.

"Who, then, will go on this embassy to the camp outside?" asked Mac Torcaill.

This time no one spoke. They feared to trust themselves to the hands of the revengeful Diarmuid.

"There is one man, known to you all, who would be our best negotiator," said Mac Torcaill, when the silence had lasted some time. "I speak of our Archbishop, Lorcan. He stands in close relationship to MacMurrough, being his brother-in-law, and uncle of the wife of the chief of the foreigners. Let him be our envoy."

"Agreed! Agreed!" came the shout of the relieved citizens. "No one better could be found."

And so it was arranged. To the camp of Diarmuid the prelate made his way, and was received with every mark of respect. With the commanders of the besiegers he negotiated for the submission of the city and for the delivery of hostages in token of their future allegiance and fealty to the rule of Diarmuid. And the citizens, convinced that all was well, that they had nothing to fear, awaited in patience and security the return of their envoy.

Meanwhile a curious scene was being enacted in another part of the hostile camp. Round a man of forbidding aspect several knights and men-at-arms were gathered. To them this man, Milo de Cogan, was addressing words of strange import.

"I tell you, friends, this is the time. The men of yonder city will have no suspicion. Their envoy sits in our camp. He negotiates for their surrender. If they yield what profit to us? They shall be received

back into favour, and we will lose the spoil which should be ours. And they say this city is rich in gold and merchandise. Why should we turn our backs on such a chance for booty?"

"Ay, there is much in what bold Milo says," muttered a Welsh marcher.

"But what is your plan?" asked a savage-looking man-at-arms. "Whatever it is my sword is at your service."

"'Tis this, bold Walter, and 'tis simple. Now, while these burghers are off their guard, to rush into the city, slaying everyone we meet. Then it will matter little to us about envoys or negotiations. The city will be ours with all its booty."

"'Tis a glorious project," said Walter, musingly. "But what will our chiefs say?"

"They are hardly so squeamish as some of their followers" replied De Cogan. "Think you Earl Richard will blame? I trow not. When we have succeeded, and we must succeed, he will be the first to praise."

"Lead on then. We are with you," cried the others.

"I promise you, brave comrades, yonder city shall be ours before the sun goes down," cried De Cogan. Then, raising his voice, he shouted: "Barons, knights, A Cogan!"

From all sides came hurrying men armed to the teeth, eager for the butchery, greedy for the plunder. Quickly two bands, under the leadership of Milo de Cogan and Raymond le Gros, were formed, and rushed on towards the city. The surprise was complete. They found unguarded gates, unmanned walls. Unarmed and defenceless, the burghers were slaughtered in heaps, while their envoy was still discussing the terms for surrender. Milo de Cogan had been right. Before nightfall Dublin was in the hands of the Anglo-Normans. And as he had further predicted, so far

from receiving blame, he, the author of the butchery, was rewarded by Strongbow with the constableship of the city. Ah! how these adventurers knew each other!

But the net they had cast around the devoted city had not caught all the fish. Away out over the sea had fled the Dane, Hasculf MacTorcaill, and many of the chief citizens. They carried away with them much of their wealth to those isles which bordered the Scottish coast and dotted the Sea of Mann, and which owned the sway of their race. Going from the city where he had ruled so long Hasculf swore that he would return again to wrench from the grip of the spoiler the settlement which his race had built up.

. . . . .

On the morning of the day on which the butchery above related occurred, two men were conversing in the camp of the Ard-ri, Rory O'Connor, beyond by Clondalkin.

"And you say," said one of them, "that the order has gone forth to break up our camp?"

"Yes, such is the order," replied the other. "In a couple of hours we must be on the march."

"And what is the explanation?" queried the other. "Surely that we are here it would be better to do something."

"I know not, Cian," replied the older man, in whom we recognize the Chief of Idrone. "I know not the reason of our retirement. But I am tired of all this foolery. Great marchings and great retirements. I fear much we are foredoomed to failure. This is the second time we have made a great hosting against this traitor king. The first led to the wretched treaty which handed back Leinster to the man who had forfeited it, and sent your father wandering. Now this."

"But I cannot understand it," said Cian. "Why was the enemy allowed to outflank us? Surely the passes of Imail and Cuala should have been guarded."

"Ay, but you forget our Ard-ri is an imbecile," replied O Riain, with a frown. "Only an imbecile would have allowed this force to pass unchallenged. Our leader has not the ability to lead, neither will he allow anyone else to do so. Lions led by an ass, that is what we seem to be. The genius of the father does not appear to have descended to the son. I cannot imagine Rory's father, Turlough, agreeing to such a thing as the casting aside of your father for the sake of this traitor. Turlough was violent, no doubt, but we have all been cursed with the same vice. But he had a head to plan both for peace and war. He would have drenched the land in blood ere this traitor and his foreigners had gained such a foothold. But this imbecile! Faugh! The thought disgusts me."

"My poor father," mused Cian, seemingly forgetful of the other's presence. "What bitterness was his!"

"Ay," said O Riain, "you saw him bent and broken. You saw his crooked shoulders and white hair. He was unable to stand up against that last bitter blow which deprived him of a kingdom and of a home. 'Twas little I could do, Cian, but that little I did willingly. And he was glad when his release came. As I knelt by his side that fatal evening of the disaster at Dundonolf he whispered to me, as the life blood poured from his side, 'Maghnus, I am glad it is all over. Look to my son,' and then he was gone. We laid him to rest in the old churchyard beyond, as gallant a warrior as ever breathed." O Riain bent his head, and was silent a long time. Then he went on: "Cian, remember that my house is your house. Come and go as you please, for I know how difficult it is to control your restless spirit, but my house is always open to you." And the generous old chief laid his hand on Cian's shoulder.

"I will remember," replied Cian. "I have no other home now save yours. Wandering has been my portion."

"Ay, and wandering it shall be, I fear," said the old chief, sadly. "Now, since this marriage of MacMurrough's daughter with this Earl Richard, you will have no home to turn to. It is said he has bestowed his kingdom on her. A strange arrangement, truly. But I doubt not she likes it well."

"Say nothing against her and you love me," said Cian, frowning slightly. "To my unfortunate cousin I owe my life. In this miserable business I hold her guiltless, and believe that she has been but a pawn in the game, bartered away to this adventurer to forward the schemes of her father. I cannot blame her, neither, my noble friend, would you, and you knew all."

"Ay, she has a gallant defender. But I loved the maiden. Was she not fostered in my house?" said the old chief. "But come, we must prepare for the march."

Again the Ard-ri had marched forth in his might, but in his might he marched away again. Great in conception, he failed in accomplishment. Showy and weak-minded, he was little fitted for the exalted position he occupied, and we can little wonder at the severe strictures passed upon him by the stern old warrior of Idrone. The only wonder is that he was at all times able to gather together such forces. Possibly the ineptitude of the Ard-ri was of as great service to the Anglo-Normans as their arms. They were, indeed, fortunate in the time fate had chosen for their coming.

And now a few words as to Cian's presence with the Ard-ri's forces. After that night when the wit and courage of two noble girls had given him life and liberty, he had rode on with flowing rein, he cared not whither. But some kindly spirit had guided his horse's feet, and as the morning sun rose up he beheld the house of O Riain only a few miles away. The old chief welcomed him as one risen from the dead. He had

mourned him, convinced that he had fallen in the attack on Dundonolf. When he had told all that happened since that day, O Riain remarked with a merry twinkle in his grey eyes:

"I hope, Cian, that you have not lost something as precious as your life. 'Tis dangerous to have such speaking eyes."

"How do you mean, noble chief?" asked Cian.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," replied O Riain. "But this maiden, Ciara Ni Riain, I think you called her."

"Yes. Do you know her?" asked Cian, starting up.

"Ay, boy, none better," replied the old chief, his voice shaking with emotion. "And glad I am that a child of mine has been able to help you to freedom."

"Say you so," cried Cian. "Ay, I marvelled at the name. But how comes it that your daughter lives in the house of Diarmuid?"

"She has known the Princess Eva, who grew up by her side here in Idrone. They have been inseparable companions, and in spite of all that has passed, have preserved their friendship. And I have not had the heart to interfere with their friendship. Too many of our friendships must be sacrificed in the tangle which exists. You will not blame me, boy?" and O Riain looked appealingly at Cian.

"Why should I blame you?" asked Cian. "Your daughter and foster-child have given me freedom."

CHAPTER XVII

IN DUBLIN—AN UNKNOWN FRIEND

"By my word, that was a close shave. Another minute, and Cian MacMurrough's days were over," and the speaker cowered back into the friendly shadows. Fearing almost to breathe, he waited, listening to the retreating footsteps of the soldiers who had disturbed him. Cian had now been a couple of days in the city. He had come from the camp of the Ard-ri, Rory, beyond by Castleknock, to seek any information as to the state of affairs amongst the garrison, now beleaguered for close on two months by the Irish forces. Up to the present his mission had been a failure, for he had not dared to make inquiries for fear of arousing suspicion. That affairs were desperate, he knew, for provisions had risen to enormous prices, but he wished to learn more than this. He wished to stumble across some information which would repay for the danger he was running. Since darkness set in he had been abroad in the silent streets. Well he knew that capture meant death, for Strongbow had given strict orders that all citizens were to remain within doors after nightfall.

When the footsteps died away he prepared to step from his place of concealment, but again footsteps struck on his ear. Hastily he drew back. Two wayfarers brushed by, almost touching him as they passed. A snatch of conversation floated to him.

"But, good Raymond," quoth one, "the position is desperate. Since the jealousy of the king has been aroused he has forbidden the passage of ships from England to our succour."

"Ay, that is so," replied the other.

"We have hardly provision for two weeks within the city now."

Cian heard no more, for they passed out of earshot. But he had recognized the voice of the second speaker, Raymond le Gros.

"This is a chance not to be missed," he muttered to himself. "I will follow them. Perhaps I may learn more."

Stealing along in the shadow of the houses, he crept up as close as he dared to the pair, who were going in the direction of Saint Mary's Port. The darkness surrounded him like a pall, and he had little fear of being seen. The only danger was that he might jostle up against some soldier in the darkness But he must chance that. The sound of the footsteps in front guided him. A clash of arms rang out, and then a loud challenge, to which the men ahead replied. A stream of light flashing out across the street told Cian that they had entered a house, the windows of which were lit up ; then silence reigned, only broken by the tread of the sentry.

"I must learn who occupies that house," muttered Cian, "but how? I dare not try to enter by the way they have gone. But, perhaps, there is some other way?"

From its size the house, which stood apart, seemed to be one of some importance, possibly that of some rich burgher or, and Cian started at the thought, the residence of some officer of the garrison, else why the entry of the two who had gone in, and the sentinel at the door?

Cautiously he moved forward. He feared to venture within the rays of light cast by the windows, for the sentinel might see him. Fortune was in his favour. At the moment the sentry turned his back towards him. Darting across the shafts of light from the windows, Cian passed the corner, out of sight of the watcher, who, unconscious of his presence, continued to march

to and fro. But the adventure had only commenced. The entry into the house still remained to be accomplished.

Stealthily Cian searched along the walls for some opening. His hand came in contact with a doorway. Pushing against it, he had the satisfaction of feeling it yield. Boldly he pushed it inwards, but the creak it gave sent shivers of apprehension through him. He listened. Apparently no one had heard. Emboldened with his success he stepped within. He was in a small courtyard, which was in pitch darkness. Groping forward he came to another door. Before a vigorous push it opened inwards, and Cian found himself in what was apparently a long hallway. From some place in front he heard the murmur of voices. Like a shadow he went forward, feeling along the wall. The voices grew more distinct. The door of the room at the end of the hall stood half open, and the light streamed out into the hall.

"Ah," muttered Cian, "my friends are over-warm. This July heat is serving me well."

And so it was, for through the open door he could hear every word which passed. But his position was one of great danger. If anyone should come into the hall he was discovered. But again fortune was kind. By his side he discovered a nook formed by the jutting of the room into the hall. Into this he stepped. Completely hidden, he listened. Within the room a weak voice was holding forth:

"Comrades," the voice came to Cian, "'tis little use for us to disguise the position from ourselves longer. The investment has now lasted for close on two months. We have almost reached the end of our provisions. The garrison and citizens have been placed on short rations, but even so, scarcely a fortnight's supply remains. If it were likely that succour would come all would be well, but the king's order has prevented that. For a month past no storeship has come in.

From the land side nothing comes. These cursed enemies of ours watch too well."

"That is unfortunately the case," said a voice which Cian recognized as that of Raymond le Gros. "And to crown all, there is this news from Wexford."

"Yes," said the first speaker, "our enemies have gained the upper hand. Since the death of Diarmuid in May last they have taken heart. True, he gave me his kingdom, but none of the chiefs recognize my authority. And in their rebellious obstinacy they have now attacked our comrade, Robert Fitzstephen, in his castle at Carrig, and he sends to us for succour, but we want succour ourselves."

"It is plain that we cannot hold out much longer," said a strange voice, "but what then? Must we surrender?"

"Surrender may come," replied the voice of Strongbow, "but not yet. We will negotiate. The king who presses us so hard has much experience in negotiating, so men say," and his listeners guffawed loudly.

"Ay," muttered Cian, "you say well, foreigner; much experience."

"And who will we send to the camp outside?" queried Raymond. "We must find one who is well known amongst them."

"Yes," said Strongbow, "that is true. Who better suited to the embassy could we find than the Archbishop, Lorcan O'Toole?"

"No, no," the cry came, "we will not have him; men say he has stirred up this opposition to us."

"And men are probably right," replied Strongbow. "But our case is desperate. We must use him for this work. He is well known amongst these Irish. It will be of much service to us to send as our negotiator one so honourably known to them. And Maurice de Prendergast will accompany him."

"Well, if it must be so, I agree," said Raymond.

"And I, and I," came from the others.

"Then we will arrange the details," said Strongbow.

And now the conversation was carried on in such low tones that, crane his neck as much as he could, Cian could hear nothing. It was galling to him to stand there without a chance to learn more. He had been successful so far, why not tempt fortune a little farther? Out from the friendly alcove he stepped and drew yet closer to the open door. And then Cian blundered. A defect in the floor caused him to stumble. The noise he made was very slight, but it was sufficient to attract the attention of the knights, who, jumping to their feet, rushed towards the hall. Cian tried to gain the alcove again, but it was too late. Already they were in the hallway.

Stepping back against the wall, Cian waited. As Raymond le Gros, who had gained the hallway first, rushed at him, he shot out his foot, and the corpulent knight went crash against the opposite wall, where he lay stunned. Leaping over his prostrate body the active Cian bounded towards the door, which he had fortunately left open.

"MacMurrough! MacMurrough Abu!" he yelled. "Follow me who can!"

Several knights rushing from the room where they had been sitting, out into the dark hall, fell headlong over the unconscious Raymond. By the time they had risen to their feet Cian was in the open air. Across the courtyard he rushed, and round the corner. But the sentinel barred his passage. He seemed to hesitate as to the proper course to pursue. He had caught a fleeting glance of a tall figure flashing through the streak of light from the windows, but whether a friend or foe he could not tell. However, little time was given him. Caught in a powerful embrace, he was hurled back against the wall, and lay there like a log. Then away like the wind bounded Cian. But the

front door was wrenched open, and into the street poured the knights, whose deliberations had been so rudely disturbed.

"Lights; lights here!" they yelled. "A hundred marks to the man who captures the spy."

And in answer to the shout, the yellow glare of torches flashed here and there, making the blackness, if it were possible, blacker. As to Cian, he was silent. After that one fierce yell of defiance he raised his voice no more. He knew the whole garrison would soon be at his heels, and had no desire to lead them to him. With little idea whither he was going he rushed on. He might be rushing into the arms of the enemy for aught he knew; but they could hardly come on him unawares. He would hear the clank of their heavy accoutrements, but he, wearing the soft cuarans, which he had donned for his night adventure, ran with little noise.

Now a bell clanked out loudly on the air. The town was aroused.

Through the night came affrighted cries. Loud excited commands rang out, and still the bell clanged out.

From the mouth of a laneway in front came the tramp of armed men. Like a hunted stag, Cian turned, but behind he saw only the flashing of the torches. Safety did not lie that way. None of those in front carried lanthorns or torches. Darting into a doorway, Cian waited breathlessly. Ah! the rush had passed. But the danger was still great. And then a curious thing happened. The door behind him seemed to give way. A hand grasped his arm, and he was drawn inside.

"Hush, not a word," said a voice in his ear.

"Who are you?" asked Cian; "who befriends me in such wise?"

"It matters not to you," whispered his rescuer, "an' I be your friend. Wait here. In a short time the

streets will be deserted. Then I will show you a place where you can reach the walls."

"Why do you do this thing?" queried Cian. "I am but a stranger to you."

"I care not whom you be, an' you be an enemy of these cursed English," said the other in a voice of suppressed fury. "Do I not owe to them the loss of wife and son, slaughtered on that red September day when they burst into our city? Think you then I care who you be?"

Gradually the streets outside grew silent, the bells ceased their clangour. The pursuit had passed on.

"Come," whispered his strange friend in the ear of Cian, "let us try now. They may search the houses later on. But you will have to swim."

Opening the door, he looked out. No one was stirring. Out into the street he drew Cian, and together they stole towards the wall. When they stood beneath it, the unknown whispered:

"Now, mount on my shoulders. The wall is low here. When you reach the top you will have to jump as far out over the waters as possible. Now!"

Astride the wall, Cian looked back. He wished to thank his strange friend; but he had vanished as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"A strange man," muttered Cian. "But we live in strange times."

Below him lapped the waters of the Liffey against the foot of the wall. Standing high over them he leaped into space. A loud splash, which startled the watcher at Saint Mary's Port, broke the stillness of the night, then silence reigned again.

Alarmed, the sentinel flashed the blaze of a torch across the waters. Perhaps its glare revealed to him the head of a swimmer. Who knows? But if it did, it soon passed out of the circle of light.

The garrison hunted in vain. The spy had slipped away.

. . . . . .

The Ard-ri, Rory, was seated with some of his principal chiefs. They had been making merry all the night. The pleasure-loving king, sitting there quaffing his wine, seemed to have little conception of the duties of a military commander in the field. Indeed, it appeared as if he were a monarch at peace with all the world entertaining his invited guests, rather than a commander who was investing a city within which was shut up a vigilant and ever-watchful enemy. To Rory O'Connor it seemed as if the pleasures and frivolities of the table were of more moment than the hardships and duties of the campaign. That many of the chiefs looked askance at the unwarlike conduct of their commander was quite apparent from the discontent written on many countenances. The older men amongst them had little trust in the vain, frivolous king, but he was the man to whom they had given their allegiance, and they had no desire to turn their backs on him. But they feared. As to the younger, they thought only of the passing hour. The free-and-easy methods of the careless king suited them.

"This constant succession of banquets and merry-makings is not to my taste," remarked a chief to O'Riain of Idrone, who sat beside him at the end of the magnificent booth which the Ard-ri had erected. "Would that O'Connor were less given to display!"

"Ay," replied O'Riain, "'twere well. I like it not. War must be carried on as war. If the chiefs of an army set such an example, what of the men? Can we blame them if they grow careless?"

"We cannot," replied the other; "'tis inevitable. We here give ourselves up to pleasure, forgetting our duty. The other night as I slept a curious dream came to me. Suddenly through my sleep seemed to sound the clash of arms, the cries of fighting men. Startled, I leaped from my couch. I rushed out of my tent. What did I see? There, stretched in slumber, I found

the clansmen who watched before my door. Rushing on I found that the fiend of sleep had overcome the greater part of the sentinels. At last I arrived at the king's tent. Rushing into his presence, for I was carried out of myself by the occurrence, I told him of the dreadful thing which had happened. When he had heard me, he laughed in my face, and yawning said: 'Good Conchobhar, I doubt not the poor fellows were tired. But you need not fear. Those foreigners of yonder city will not disturb our slumbers.' 'O, noble O'Connor,' I asked, 'will you not take any steps to remedy such an evil? For, believe me, it is a dangerous thing that such laxity should prevail.' 'It grows late,' he returned, 'to-morrow will be time enough. I am tired, good Conchobhar, and would sleep.' With a curse in my heart, I turned away. But I slept no more that night, and I have taken care that a close watch is kept night and day where O'Kelly of Hy Maine guards. But my confidence is shaken."

"'Tis little wonder," said O'Riain. "So much time spent in feasting is not good for discipline. And this enemy yonder is watchful, even though he may be weak. Pray God that no evil comes of all this idle buffoonery, more suited to an aonach than an encampment of armed men."

"Had an attack come on that night of which I speak," said O'Kelly, "we were cut to pieces."

"Ay," replied O'Riain, "but Rory thinks more of his pleasure than of his campaign. 'Tis no wish of mine to condemn him, but our commander is not what he should be. The time spent in revelry of this kind," and he frowned round the assembly, "were better spent in breaching the walls."

At the moment a diversion occurred. Outside the tent was heard a loud commotion. Then a clansman presented himself to the king.

"Noble king," he cried, "a warrior awaits without.

He comes from the beleaguered city, and demands admittance."

O'Connor beckoned a steward to his side.

"Go you out," he said, "and see who this messenger is."

The steward retired, and returning almost instantly, told that the person who awaited announced himself as the bearer of important intelligence, and desired admittance; but, he added:

"Noble king, he appears but little fitted to present himself before you, all splashed and covered with mud, as he is."

"Go tell him," said O'Connor, "that we may not see him just now. To-morrow we will listen to his intelligence."

But O'Riain rose to his feet, his face showed the fierce struggle that was going on within him to suppress his anger.

"Noble O'Connor," he cried, "this person who awaits is doubtless the messenger, Cian MacMurrough, whom we sent secretly to the city two days ago. He has been working while we have been feasting. 'Twere well to admit him."

"Oh, say you so, O'Riain," said O'Connor, his weak, irresolute face, flushing at the rebuke conveyed in O'Riain's words. "But there is no reason for haste. His news will not lose by a little waiting."

"This is hardly the way to carry on war, noble king," said O'Riain, his grey eyes glittering fiercely. "Forgive me, if I appear insistent, but rather do I think that pleasure can wait on war, than that war should wait on pleasure. News of the state of things in the city would be very valuable."

"Ay, so it would," chimed in his neighbour, O'Kelly.

For an instant O'Connor gazed round the assemblage. He would have sent Cian MacMurrough away; he had no desire that the cares of State should interfere with the pleasures of the evening. But the will of the

stronger man swayed him, and he had an uncomfortable feeling that his sending away of the spy would not be popular. Therefore, he yielded with as good a grace as possible, and bade the messenger be admitted.

For an instant the eyes of Cian gleamed with anger as he looked on the feasters. It seemed to him strangely incongruous that while he had been risking his life, the chief of the investing force should be spending his time in idle frivolity. And surely he seemed strangely out of place standing there in his mud-bespattered, torn garments, before the brilliant king who was intent only on his own amusement.

"What news do you bring, noble youth?" asked the king. "Speak quickly."

"Noble O'Connor," said Cian, "I went to yonder city in accordance with my instructions. I have been there two days. I found the garrison reduced to extremity through the scarcity of food, they have only a fortnight's supply in the city. And news had reached them of an uprising of the men of Hy Kinsella against Fitzstephen, who must surrender unless help reach him within three days. The Earl Richard, their leader, has decided to parley for terms. Hidden, I listened to their conversation. They spoke of sending the Archbishop, Lorcan O'Toole, and a foreigner, Maurice de Prendergast, to you, but I failed to learn more, for an unfortunate accident revealed my presence to them, and it was only by the aid of a citizen I escaped from the city."

Cian paused. Turning to the chiefs, O'Connor cried:

"Ah, nobles and chiefs, we have won. In a few days time yon city will be ours. Let this embassy come; we will know how to receive it."

Turning to Cian he said:

"We thank you, brave youth, for your information. Chiefs, we owe much to this gallant youth. What shall be his reward?"

But Cian threw up his head proudly.

"Noble king," he cried, "I wish for no reward. The success of our cause will be sufficient reward for me."

"There stands a noble youth," muttered O'Riain to O'Kelly. "Would that our king were like him."

"Ah, 'twere better for our safety," replied the other.

"Indeed you are a brave youth," said O'Connor, chagrined at the loss of an opportunity for the display of his generosity. "But you will sup with us."

"Noble king," replied Cian, "I crave your permission to retire. I would go to my tent. Since yesternight I have not slept."

"Go, then," said O'Connor. "I will not bid you stay. Nobles, we will drink to the downfall of yonder city."

But O'Riain and O'Kelly of Hy Maine, saluting the king, also begged permission to withdraw. The permission given, though not with a very good grace, they quitted the royal booth along with Cian.

"Fools! fools!" burst out O'Riain, when they were in the open air. "It seems tempting fortune to see the manner in which this investment is carried on."

"Ay," returned O'Kelly, "we seem to be asking for defeat, for we are taking no measures to secure victory. We have succeeded so far more by good luck than any merit of our own."

"What think you of our prospects?" asked O'Riain of Cian, who was walking along silently.

"I think victory is within our grasp," replied Cian, "if we know how to seize it. But my heart misgives me. I see around me foolish over-confidence, love of pleasure, forgetfulness of duty. Our chiefs are careless, following the example of our leader. And when the chiefs are careless, think you the men will be otherwise? I know not if it is right for me, a mere youth, to speak thus, but I cannot keep silent. I have gone to yon city, have risked much to gain this information which the king seemed so loth to receive.

It would interfere with his pleasure, forsooth. And on my return I find him engaged in idle amusement, as if no watchful, desperate enemy watched within yonder walls," and he pointed away towards the city. "It does not impress one with the conviction that all is well, that we shall win the prize for which we struggle."

"I fear you are right, Cian," replied O'Riain, shaking his head. "God grant there be no disaster."

"Amen to that," ejaculated O'Kelly. And then they bade each other good-night.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FOOL'S WAGES

The day was not far sped when the embassy was observed approaching the camp. The Ard-ri received the ambassadors, Archbishop Lorcan O'Toole and Maurice de Prendergast, in his booth, surrounded by all the pomp and display which he loved to affect. By his side stood Cu Uladh O'Dunleavy, from the Ards of Ulster, who had come from his camp by Clontarf; and Domhnall O'Briain of Thomond, who kept ward and watch by Kilmainham; with the chiefs and septs who had accompanied the Ard-ri.

With little delay the ambassadors stated the terms on which their chief, the Earl Richard, was willing to surrender. Through his wife, the Princess Eva, the daughter of the late King of Leinster, he had received that kingdom. As the vassal of the Ard-ri he was willing to hold it, paying tribute to him, if the Ard-ri were willing to raise the siege. But O'Connor would not hear of such terms. The information which Cian had brought had strengthened his resolution. He demanded that the Earl should surrender the territory named by him, and which he claimed to hold in right of his wife. With regard to the cities, Dublin, Waterford, and Wexford, he was willing to allow the Earl to retain these, arguing, no doubt, that the Earl's Anglo-Normans would not be more troublesome subjects to him than had been his Danish ones. If the Earl Richard were willing to accept these terms he would raise the siege; if not he would instantly attack the walls.

"And hark ye," he cried to the ambassadors, "I possess the power to crush you. Look there."

And he pointed through the open doorway to the tents and booths of his numerous army.

"My friends," he added, "I have certain knowledge that you are reduced to the last extremity. Your granaries are almost empty, and hunger will soon gnaw at your vitals. Surrender then while there is yet time, for by the word of O'Connor, if I hear not from you within three days, I will batter the walls about your ears."

"This is your final word, noble king," said Maurice de Prendergast.

"My final word," replied O'Connor, "and I will fulfil it to the letter."

Bowing to the king and his nobles the envoys departed back to the city. They had failed in their object, but whether the promise of the Ard-ri was fulfilled let the sequel show.

No sooner had they gone than O'Connor turned to the nobles.

"My friends," he cried, "that affair is well concluded. In a short time we will receive the news of the submission of these foreigners. Heard you ever such a proposal? That I should allow this foreign earl to retain possession of the kingdom of Leinster. He would be my vassal, forsooth. But O'Connor is not to be fooled in such wise. Come, my friends, the sun shines brightly. Let us away to the river. Too long those envoys have interfered with our customary relaxation. But we will make amends."

Some of the chiefs wished to call his attention to the necessity for a stricter watch against an attack by the city's garrison, now reduced probably to desperation. O'Kelly of Hy Maine stepped forward.

"Noble O'Connor," he exclaimed, "this garrison yonder will be pushed to desperation by your message. Would it not be well to look to our sentinels? An attack might come at any moment. Let us see that a careful watch is kept. Then you can away."

"O'Kelly," replied O'Connor, laughing heartily, "think

you there is any fear of yonder handful of starvelings; may we not take our pleasure through dread of their attack? Ah, my friend, I fear you grow timorous."

O'Kelly laid his hand on his sword, his dark face flushing angrily.

"Noble king," he cried, "none have ever used such words to me. But we may not quarrel here in the face of the enemy," and he thrust his half-drawn sword back into its scabbard.

"Forgive my foolish words," cried O'Connor, laying his hand on O'Kelly's arm, "I did but jest."

"I can forgive you much," replied O'Kelly, "but will you not see to the guards?"

"I promise you that when I return it shall be my first care," replied the poor, obstinate fool, bent only on making his own will prevail. "Come, let us go."

But with a look of contempt on his face O'Kelly of Hy Maine strode from the booth.

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Beyond in the city a very different scene was going forward.

When the envoys had returned to the headquarters of the earl, and given their account of the outcome of their embassy, the assembled knights had listened in gloomy silence. It is hardly likely they had expected any other result, and were not surprised at the reply sent by the Ard-ri. It angered them to think that they were to lose the spoils for which they had adventured, but the presence of the Archbishop restrained them from giving voice to their bitterness. Though they had selected him as their envoy, it is certain they did not trust him. Well they knew that his efforts had led to the formation of the alliance against them, but their state was desperate, and they had no better man. The position which he occupied as ecclesiastical superior of the invested city, and friend of the investers, gave a

peculiar weight to his embassy. As to the Archbishop himself he was urged on to his efforts of mediation, not so much by a desire to secure good terms for them as to prevent the effusion of blood, and spare his flock all the horrors of famine and pestilence. But now he had failed the Anglo-Normans, and they had no further use for him. When he had withdrawn from the council the knights drew closer together.

"Faugh!" burst out Raymond le Gros, "the presence of that shaven cleric almost chokes me."

"Ay, I doubt it not," replied Maurice de Prendergast, "but we must make use of strange tools. However, he is gone; we may speak without fear."

"Ah, good Maurice, have you then other things to relate?" queried Strongbow, who sat at the head of the table.

"Ay," replied the knight, "I would speak of things which may extricate us from our desperate strait. When I went to the camp yonder, I noticed many things which encouraged me to hope. To my eyes it seemed that much carelessness was displayed. We rode close to the encampment without challenge. As I returned hither the thought rushed across my mind that it would be a serious matter if any enemy should swoop down."

"Ah," ejaculated the earl, while the others bent forward eagerly.

"It seemed to me," went on de Prendergast, "that they had little thought of surprise. We saw a huge camp, but it reminded me more of a huge hunting party than the encampment of an investing force. These things lead me to hope."

"What?" cried Raymond le Gros.

"That a sally might be successful," replied de Prendergast.

"'Tis a pity our force is so small," said Raymond, twirling his yellow moustache.

"But we might make the attempt, desperate though

it be," said Robert de Quenci, who had not yet spoken. "Better to die with arms in our hands than be starved into submission."

"You are right, good Robert," cried Strongbow, rising to his feet, "'tis better. Naught faces us here but the pinch of hunger, or a surrender which would hand back to these enemies all we have struggled for. At least we will make a bid for victory. If death comes we will meet it fighting. If this thing which Maurice says be true, we may be able to steal upon this camp at Castleknock unawares, particularly as our enemies may be looking for surrender rather than attack. The camp of this king will be our objective. If we can break it up, doubtless the others will march away. Come, my friends, we will prepare for our sally."

A few words suffices for the rest. In three divisions of two hundred men each, under the leadership of Raymond, Milo de Cogan and Strongbow, the sallying party left the city about four o'clock. Too well they had calculated the chances of a surprise. The poor, weak fool, bent on pleasure, had taken no measures to prevent it. Unnoticed the Anglo-Normans crept along, till close by Fionnghlas they rushed amongst the unsuspecting kern, who, all unarmed as they were, were slaughtered without mercy. Through the camp raged the foreigners, but little effective resistance met them. Betrayed by the foolish over-confidence of their leader, the Irish could offer little opposition. And he, the author of all the mischief, Rory O'Connor, who had been cooling himself in the waters of the Liffey, barely escaped the slaughter. The force which had set out with such little prospects of success returned to the city laden with booty and provisions, while the demoralized forces of the Ard-ri streamed away across the country, broken and dispersed. Disgusted with the worse than foolishness which had such a disastrous sequel, the other forces which surrounded the city marched away, leaving Strongbow in possession

of the place which he had won by treachery and held by watchfulness and intrepidity. The obstinacy and pleasure-seeking of a fool had aided them to victory.

But there was one division of O'Connor's forces which had watched against such a disaster. Startled by the warning cry of his sentinels, O'Riain rushed from his tent. Close on the heels of O'Riain had followed Cian MacMurrough, who leaped from his couch to meet the enemy. Vainly they tried to stem the rush of panic-stricken men, and then when they saw that all was lost, gave the order for retreat. Slowly they fell back, presenting an unbroken front to the enemy, backed by the clansmen of O'Kelly of Hy Maine. With little loss the two clans reached safety. Then they parted, and with bitter hearts continued their different ways back to their own territories.

CHAPTER XIX

O'RIAIN'S FOREBODINGS—THE YOUNG TANIST

"Cian, boy, I feel it. I know my course is almost sped. But I don't feel any sorrow." The speaker was O'Riain of Idrone. "I feel that I would be glad to leave all this turmoil and misery behind me."

"Noble O'Riain, you who have been my friend," said Cian. "Do not speak of such things. You have many years of usefulness before you yet."

"No, my boy, I am convinced that my end is near," said O'Riain. "Last night as I lay sleeping, I was awakened by a piercing cry. It was the cry of the spirit of our race which caoins the death of our chiefs. But do not think, my son, that this has disheartened me. To the end O'Riain of Idrone will do his duty," and the brave old chief threw up his leonine head proudly. "But, Cian, when I look round myself and see the havoc which reigns in our country, the ruin which our own miserable bickerings brought about, I would gladly welcome escape. When I think of the disgrace which attended our arms the other day, my heart sinks within me. I could wish to live to oppose my sword against these foreigners, but it cannot be. My knell is sounded. Soon Maghnus O'Riain will have crossed the border."

"Cease, I pray you, these sad forebodings," cried Cian. "Our misfortune of the other day has saddened your spirit."

"No," replied O'Riain, steadfastly. "I have received my warning. I have arranged my affairs. I have sent to Fearna for my daughter. She should be here any

day now. And, Cian, you whom I regard as mine own son, when I am gone you will protect her. No son of mine shall rule after me. Our interminable broils bereft me of son and tanist. But no chieftain can leave his clan without a leader. There is only one thing more which remains to be done. And, Cian, it closely concerns you."

"Concerns me!" echoed Cian, surprised.

"Ay, you," replied O'Riain. "And, Cian, my son, you will grant the request I am about to make."

"If it be possible," replied Cian.

"It is this," said the chief. "I have no tanist to take my place. I have decided to call the clan together and, adopting you as my son, proclaim you tanist. I know the clan will consent, for they have seen many proofs of your fitness to lead. Though young, you have gained their confidence and respect. And with the exception of my daughter, there is no person of my immediate family living. Consent to this thing and make me happy."

"Noble O'Riain," cried Cian. "Gladly I give my consent if it will make you happy. But you have many years before you yet."

"We shall see," replied the old chief, with a shake of his grey head. "We shall see."

Then he embraced his companion tenderly.

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The following morning the wishes of the chief were carried out. With acclamation the clansmen received the name of their new tanist. Well they knew his bravery, for they had seen it tried on many an occasion of direst danger. They knew they could find no one more fitted for the position. To the words of their old chief they listened with respect, as he extolled the prowess of him who was to be their future leader in peace and war.

"Nobles, and clansmen of Idrone," cried O'Riain, "I present to you the youth I have chosen to be my tanist. Young he is in years, but old in deeds of bravery. You have seen him where blows fell thickly. You have seen him where the occasion required coolness and courage. Did he fail?"

An answering shout of "No" pealed through the oaken-vaulted chamber.

"This, then, is the warrior whom I give you to be your chief when I have passed from your midst," went on O'Riain. "In war he shall lead you against the rude shocks of your enemies; in peace he shall guide you with wisdom. When the call of death shall come to me I shall answer it, safe in the knowledge that I have left to you, my children, one who shall be my worthy successor. Does any one object to his election?"

But no voice replied. Their chief was right, they all knew. Quickly the ceremonies were carried through, and then Cian, having adopted the tribe-name instead of his own, went forth from the hall, no longer a man without clan of his own.

In the evening the daughter of the chieftain arrived. As Cian bent over her hand his thoughts flew back to that other night when this girl with blue eyes and golden hair had risked so much for him. He wondered if she remembered, but she made no sign. And he, shy and reticent, feared to question.

But at night-time, as they sat at table, the conversation turned on the event which of all others lived in Cian's memory.

"Ciara, my daughter," said O'Riain, "how did you leave the Princess Eva?"

"Well in health, but sad at heart," replied the girl. "The traitorism of her father, with its terrible consequences, and this marriage with the chief of the foreigners, have darkened her life, and then the death of her father, who treated her so harshly, was a bitter blow. For in spite of everything she loved him."

"Do you think, then, that she was blameless in this matter?" asked O'Riain.

"Entirely blameless," replied Ciaria, warmly. "Placed in the same position, I, myself, might have wed this foreigner."

"I can hardly imagine the daughter of O'Riain of Idrone wedding with a foreigner, particularly one of those, nor can I think of her father forcing her," said the old chief.

"But you must remember the boundless ambition of this MacMurrough, who was, unfortunately, my uncle," interposed Cian. "No one could imagine your daughter made the forfeit of your ambition as the Princess Eva has been."

"Oh, I know you are her defender," grumbled O'Riain, but his grumbling was little more than pretence.

Cian said nothing. But Ciara gave him a swift look of gratitude, which caused him to blush to the roots of his hair.

"Behold yonder," rallied O'Riain, "one who can believe nothing but good of your Princess Eva, the tanist of Idrone, Cian MacMurrough, my adopted son. He will believe all the good you have to relate of her."

"And why not?" asked Cian. "I have had experience of her goodness."

"Ah, you remember then," said Ciara, turning towards him. "I thought you had forgotten."

"And why should I forget?" asked Cian.

"Men have such short memories for benefits conferred," she replied saucily. "I thought you had forgotten, since you did not refer to our former meeting previously. So many things have happened since; and then a feeling of chagrin prevented me speaking of a topic which I thought you had no desire to call to mind."

"A MacMurrough never forgets," replied Cian,

looking into her eyes. "I shall never forget the brave deed which gave me life. For I had determined, ere my uncle should have had his will, that I would die sword in hand. But I would fain learn of what happened when my escape was discovered."

"'Tis told in a few words," said Ciara. "After I had left you that night in Waterford, I returned to the princess. A look told her you were gone. In fear and trembling I waited. I knew you had succeeded in leaving the city, for there had been no alarm. 'Twas about an hour afterwards when a clansman hurried up to the king and whispered in his ear. Fearfully I cast a look in his direction. His face was livid with anger. He leaped to his feet, and in a trembling voice shouted out: 'Barons, knights, the prisoner has escaped!' The mask was off. He had told his daughter that you were only a guest to be enlarged when the wedding festivities were over. 'What prisoner?' inquired the princess, quietly. 'Who but this nephew of mine,' replied the king, 'But was he not a guest?' asked the princess, looking into her father's blazing eyes. 'Surely the absence of one guest more or less will make little difference where there are so many?' But with a furious oath he rushed from the room to your empty prison. From the unfortunate sentinel, who had been released from his bonds, he could learn little, thanks to your precautions. Through the town a minute search was made, but with the same result. No one had seen the prisoner, and the foster-brother of the princess kept silence. At last it was felt that further search was useless, and the king, baulked of his revenge, returned to the banqueting hall. There he sat gnawing his nails, and glaring around as if he suspected everyone. I could have laughed in his face, but that I was so frightened. But he could hardly have had any suspicion of me, because I had been absent from the banquet only a few minutes on Eva's business. Had he known, his revenge would have been a terrible one,

and the protection of Eva would hardly have saved me," and she shuddered at the recollection.

"But," she added, laughing merrily, "let us not think any more of the danger. Let us only think of the success."

"And to think that I exposed this maiden to such horrible danger," muttered Cian.

Aloud he remarked: "Can you wonder, now, noble O'Riain, that I defend the Princess Eva. Though she be allied with this foreign earl I cannot think ill of her. And if I owe so much to her, what of your fair daughter?"

She laughed in his face, and said:

"Young man, you remember my words at Waterford: "'You owe all to the Princess Eva.'"

But her blushing face and sparkling eyes showed she was not so insensible of his praise as she pretended.

CHAPTER XX

IN CAROS WOOD

A horseman was riding swiftly through the mist of an August morning. That he had journeyed with speed was apparent from the foam-flecks which covered his horse. As he topped a hill he reined in his horse, and, shading his eyes from the rays of the sun, gazed across the valley.

"Ha!" he cried. "Yonder it lies. And the sight gladdens me. My horse would not hold out much longer. But a few minutes will complete my work now."

Before him rose up the white-walled dun of O'Riain of Idrone, standing on the top of a gently-rising eminence, and surrounded by wide-spreading woods. Very pleasant and peaceful the valley looked to the horseman as he sat there, but he sighed as he thought of how soon its peace was to be broken by the tocsin of war.

But he roused himself suddenly and urged his weary steed on.

"This is not the time for day-dreaming," he muttered. "I may not halt. The quicker Maghnus O'Riain is on the march the better. There is no time to lose."

A few minutes and he had reined in his horse before the gate of the dun, where an armed clansman stood on guard.

"Summon your chief," cried out the horseman. "I would have speech with him."

Seizing the horn which hung from his girdle, the clansman blew a winding blast which echoed and re-echoed from the hills around.

"Go tell our chief," cried the sentinel to the giolla

who came hurrying to his side, "that a messenger awaits him."

Hardly had the servant disappeared than the chieftain of Idrone came from the house.

"How now?" he cried, when he saw the horseman. "You bear important news, if one may judge by the speed with which you have ridden."

"I come from the house of O'Toole, and I bring news which brooks not of delay," replied the horseman.

"Ha, say you so!" cried O'Riain. "Come, then. When you have eaten I will hear your story."

Dismounting, and throwing the reins of his horse to a giolla, who came running up, the messenger accompanied the chief within the house. When he had eaten the generous meal set before him he told the reason for his coming.

"News has reached our chief, Maurice O'Toole," he said, "that the foreigners are on the march towards Hy Kinsella, where one of their number is besieged by the men of that territory. They will pass this way. I have ridden since the dawn to bear you news of their coming, for our chief feared they might come upon you unprepared."

"I thank him for his kindly thought," said O'Riain, "and you, brave warrior, for your speedy coming."

"What force do the foreigners bring?" asked Cian, who had been summoned.

"I know not," replied the messenger. "None of our scouts had come in when I rode away."

"That is unfortunate," said Cian. "But we shall not allow him to pass unmolested."

"We shall not," cried O'Riain, with flashing eyes. "We have now an opportunity to wipe out our disgrace at Dublin."

The sound of horns brought the clansmen hurrying to their chief. In a few burning words he told them of the coming of the foreigners. They answered him with loud shouts, and demanded to be led against them.

"You shall have your wish," cried O'Riain. "We will show these foreigners that there are still warriors in Idrone. Prepare, then, to defend your land. We shall march within the hour."

And within the hour every available man marched away from the green before the white-walled dun of O'Riain, their pipes skirling shrilly, their trumpets braying loudly. At the gate, Ciara ni Riain bade adieu to her father, whispering as she clung round his neck:

"Return speedily, dear father. I shall watch anxiously for your coming. Oh, if anything should happen!"

Ah, if she had only known! O'Riain returned her caress with a lingering tenderness, whispering in her ear:

"Be brave, Ciara, my daughter. Remember always that you are the daughter of a warrior."

There were tears in the eyes of the stern old war-dog as he turned hurriedly away. Was it that that warning caoine again sounded in his ear, that same voice whispered in his ear: "You fight for the last time, bold chief?"

To Cian the daughter of O'Riain said no word as he bent over her hand, but to one who heard, as the tall form of the young tanist disappeared into the woods, her breathed prayer would have conveyed much.

"O, kind God," she prayed, her eyes wet with tears, "Watch over my father in this coming strife. O, clement God, Thou who seest the things of heaven and earth, who watchest over all, give the protection of Thy powerful hand to this gallant youth. Shield him from the shafts of the enemy. Grant, O King of the World, that they return unharmed to my side."

. . . . . .

Night and day the Earl's forces had pushed on from Dublin towards their objective, the fort at Carraig,

where the knight, Robert Fitzstephen, was so hard beset. So far everything had gone well. Nothing untoward had occurred to stay their progress. After the failure at Dublin the Irish seemed to regard the proceedings of the Earl with indifference. By the northern spurs of the Blackstairs the Anglo-Normans had swung along, aud now were approaching the banks of the little Burren, which, flowing southwards from the upper part of the Hy Kinsella country, wound its tortuous course through Caros Wood. Now rose up before them the dark shadows of Caros Wood, through whose centre their way lay.

Fearing to trust his men to that dangerous fastness, the Earl called a halt. He feared to advance, and yet was unwilling to retreat. But when he consulted with his officers they urged him to push on. "So far," they reasoned, "we have met with no opposition. To retreat now would be unfortunate, as speed is so necessary if we wish to reach Fitzstephen in time. Let us push on then, in God's name." And the Earl yielded. Once more the force moved forward. An hour and they had entered the wood. Above them giant trees upreared themselves, their branches interwoven and intertwined so thickly that they hardly permitted the sunbeams to struggle through. Little wonder if the Earl felt a shiver of apprehension pass through him.

"Cautiously, my men," he cried. "Go cautiously."

"Fear not. No enemy shall oppose us to-day," cried out Theiler Fitzhenry, who rode by his side. "The rats have sought their holes."

Hardly were the boastful words out of his mouth when a stone, cast with unerring aim, crashed against his steel helmet, splitting it into fragments. With a loud cry the knight threw up his arms, and fell crashing from his horse, blood streaming from a deep wound in his head.

"Back, men; back!" yelled Strongbow.

But they could not retreat now. Whatever the

cost they should push on. The pass behind was closed. At their backs rose up the wild, fierce yells of the Idronians. Stones and darts whistled through the air. But they could see no enemy. Cian, who, had been sent on ahead to the mouth of the pass, kept his small band well under cover. He knew their linen ionars were little protection against the lances and shafts of the enemy.

"On! on!" shouted the Earl. "We must cut our way through."

But the position was perilous in the extreme. Men began to fall around him. Fixing a shaft to the bow he had provided himself with, Cian let fly at the Earl. But the shaft only rattled on his steel corselet. His next try was more successful. With the feathered shaft buried in his neck, a man-at-arms sank to earth. But gradually the English, though suffering badly, forced their way onward. Stone-slings and darts were poor weapons against the armour of the knights and the thickly-padded leathern jerkins of the archers.

Then up against the labouring English the intrepid Cian led his little band. Leaping from the thickets, the clansmen rushed on. Up against the ranks of the enemy they sprang, their shining battle-axes cleaving a way, their spears reddening in the blood of the foreigners. But the English withstood the bold attempt, and slowly Cian drew back again to shelter.

And now a lull came. It seemed as if the Idronians had tired of their furious onset. Heartily the earl and his companions wished that it were so. For some time they had marched on in silence. But they were soon to know whether the sudden cessation meant a retirement of the Idronians, or only a more determined attack. The pass twisted suddenly, and then they saw the reason for the falling off in the attack. Before them they beheld a stout barricade of trees which had been thrown across the way. Behind it were massed the clansmen of Idrone. Dismayed, the English halted.

But they were given little time for thought. An avalanche of stones and darts rattled amongst them. The English archers, drawing, sent a shower of arrows rattling against the stockade. Some of the defenders, who had incautiously exposed themselves, fell.

"Cover, clansmen, cover," rang out the voice of Cian. "Do not expose yourselves."

Gallantly the knights and men-at-arms rushed forward against the stockade, but they reeled back before the stubborn defence. Again and again they rushed on, but just as often retired. Cian's longbow reaped a deadly harvest. It seemed as if the Anglo-Normans would be forced to retreat.

"Saint David to our aid," cried Raymond le Gros, furiously. "Will it be said that we retired before this handful of ill-armed kern."

"There may be a way to save the day," said Strongbow. "Send hither Nichol, who is a famous archer."

Forward stepped the man.

"Nichol," explained the Earl, "I have sent for you. We are hard pressed. I have knowledge of your skill with the longbow. I wish that you exercise it against yon rabble."

"Gladly will I do so, Lord Earl," replied Nichol. "The Lord will aid my aim against this foul and treacherous people."

"Take your position in yonder tree which overlooks the stockade. Mark out their leaders. When you have done so, let your shafts fly."

"Good, Lord Earl," replied Nichol; "it shall be done."

Taking a bow from one of the archers he tested it.

"Ay, this will do," exclaimed Nichol, when he had satisfied himself as to its fitness. Unnoticed by the Idronians, just then engaged in repelling an attack directed towards covering the movements of the archer, he climbed into the tree indicated by the Earl. Ensconced amongst its branches he waited.

Again the English rushed to the assault. But it was little use. They were able to make little headway. And then the silent watcher saw his opportunity. Beside Cian, the brave old chief of Idrone was directing the defence, his grey locks floating behind him, his eyes flashing as he shouted his slogan.

Carefully Nichol fitted his shaft, then, taking careful aim, he paused till the old chief sprang forward towards a threatened point. Twang—sounded out the released bowstring, and the deadly shaft sped downwards.

"O'Riain! O'Riain Abu!" pealed the slogan of the old warrior. "They yield. Strike! Strike for Idrone.... Ah!"

An instant O'Riain held himself erect, then reeled forward and fell prone, the shaft buried in his bosom.

"Cian, my son," he breathed. "My time has come."

With a wild cry of grief and rage Cian sprang forward. An instant he gazed at the chief. Fitting an arrow to his bow he gazed towards the tree from which the fatal shaft had come. Intent on watching the effect of his shot, Nichol had pushed aside the branches. Instantly the bow-string twanged, and with Cian's arrow buried in his heart, the archer toppled from the bough whereon he had been sitting, and he fell to the ground lifeless.

"Revenge!" shouted Cian. "Idrone Abu!"

Springing to the side of the prostrate chief he supported his head on his arm. "Cian, my son," whispered the old chief. "The warning voice spoke truly. But fight on. Do not let these English triumph."

Dashing the tears from his eyes, Cian gave orders to a couple of clansmen to carry the old chief to a place of safety, and then continued the fight. But the fall of the old chief had weakened the resolution of the Idronians. For some time longer they struggled against the enemy, but a gloom rested over all. The defence had not the spirit it had before the disastrous blow had fallen. Fearing that his weak little force might be

overwhelmed, the young leader gave the order to retire.

For a long time the Earl waited. Then, surprised by the stillness, he moved again to the attack. But no stinging darts met him. No fierce war-cry rang out. Clearing the barrier from their path, the Anglo-Normans continued their march forward, only too glad to be able to continue it. The Earl made no attempt to pursue the retiring Idronians. He had suffered too heavily. Already he had lost valuable time, and when he arrived at Wexford he found the town in flames, and the townsmen withdrawn to Beag Eire, a little island out in the harbour, with their prisoner, Robert Fitzstephen. With furious hearts the Earl's force continued on their way to Waterford.

Bearing their wounded chief on a roughly-constructed bier, the Idronians returned sadly to their own country. Cian's heart was heavy within him. He had loved the old chief as if he were his own father. And now to think that he was being borne back to die amongst the people he had loved so well. Few words were spoken as they continued their sad journey. For they knew that the slogan of their gallant old chief would rally them no more to the strife, that his war-harness would hang idly in the hall which had known his voice.

CHAPTER XXI

FAREWELL

It was the evening of the day on which the gallant old Maghnus O'Riain had been borne back from the Wood of Caros, to die within his ancestral dun. Outside the darkness had settled down over the earth, while a gentle wind sighed around the house. It seemed to mourn for the gallant life ebbing away.

At the bedside of the dying chief stood Cian, stern and silent. Suddenly the old chieftain sat erect.

"Cian, my son," he said, "the time draws near. Not long now till I will have left you. While there is yet time I wish to say a few words to you. I have arranged everything, both concerning yourself and the welfare of my clan. In you, Cian, I give to them a chief who will not shrink from the duties of leadership, to whom they can turn when difficulties beset them, one who will be their guide and friend, as I have tried to be. But there is one other trust I would leave you."

He paused as if to gather strength. All the while his hand lovingly caressed the golden tresses of the fair head bowed on his pillow.

"Why do you weep, Ciara, my daughter?" he asked. "The daughter of O'Riain must be brave."

"Oh, father, father," cried the poor girl, raising her tear-stained face. "How can I let you go? And to remain here alone throughout the years."

"Not alone, Ciara; not alone," replied O'Riain, stroking her hand. "I leave you a brother to fill my place. Cian," and his voice seemed to gain strength, "when I am gone my daughter will be alone. She was all I had to love until you came into my life. No

treasure of mind has been more jealously guarded. To your care I commit her. Guard her as if she was your own sister. Be to her as if you were of her own blood. You will do this for me? 'Tis a dying man who asks," and the chieftain of Idrone gazed wistfully into the eyes of Cian. It seemed as if he would read his soul. Unflinchingly his gaze was returned. Satisfied with his scrutiny, O'Riain added:

"Promise me, Cian—promise."

"I promise," replied Cian, placing his hand within the grasp of the chief. "Your trust will be sacred to me."

An instant Ciara Ni Riain raised her head. An instant she gazed steadfastly into the eyes of Cian. Then, turning to her father, she murmured lowly:

"I thank you, father."

"God bless you both, my children," said the old chief. "I shall die happy in the knowledge that this is settled."

A painful spasm seized him.

"Quick, Cian," he gasped, "the wine. Something remains yet to be done."

Reviving under the influence of the powerful fluid, he went on:

"The clan, Cian; summon them hither. I cannot go without bidding them farewell."

Silently and mournfully the clansmen trooped into the presence of their chief. In silence they gathered round the bed. They were gathered there, old warriors whose white beards and rugged countenances proclaimed that they had seen the youth of the man who was leaving them, younger men whose years were yet few. Gloom had settled on the faces of all, for young and old they loved their warrior chief. He spoke amidst a deathlike silence.

"Draw in closer, my children, for my voice is not so strong as it was wont to be," he smiled faintly. "I have sent for you clansmen of Idrone, that we may bid each other farewell. I have been your leader in peace

and war for many a day. We have grown grey in each other's service. But I can journey with you no more." In the blaze of the candles, the set grim faces of the silent clansmen shone white. Some there were who wept. "The call has come that Maghnus O'Riain should lay down his sword. I obey. In the coming years, when I shall be no more with you, be as faithful, as loyal, to the tanist who succeeds me as you have been to me. United one with the other, oppose the enemies who shall come against you. To your chief and country be you true."

He paused and motioned towards the wine. When he had drunk, he proceeded:

"Clansmen, this, my daughter, I leave to your protection. Share with my son"—he indicated Cian—"who will be your chief, her guardianship. See ye that no harm befalls her. And now the moment has come when we must part. Remember the words of your chief, Maghnus O'Rian."

A deep-throated assent rolled through the room. Then before their dying chief the clansmen filed out, saluting with uplifted arm. Tears rolled down the cheeks of many a fierce war-dog, who with hard, glittering eyes, had withstood the wild shock of battle and quailed not.

As the last clansman withdrew from the room with bent head O'Riain seized the hand of Cian.

"Cian," he gasped, "the call. Again it sounds. Guard ye well, Ciara."

A sigh, and the chief of Idrone fell back into the arms of his adopted son. His noble spirit had fled away into the Beyond.

With a cry of anguish Ciara threw herself across the body of her father. For a long time Cian remained gazing down at the still form with set face. Then, stooping, he touched the weeping girl.

"Come," he whispered gently, "come. It is time."

. . . . .

Several days had passed since that mournful scene at the bedside of Maghnus O'Riain. Above a grave in the old churchyard, where so many of the O'Riain's slept, a youth and maiden were standing. Silence brooded over all, broken only by the soft sighing of the evening breeze.

At last the voice of Cian broke the calm.

"Weep not, Ciara," he said. "Our gallant father died as he wished to die. A warrior's death fighting against the enemies of his people. His death was worthy of his life. Why then should we mourn him?"

"Ah, Cian, you know not how I loved him," whispered Ciara: "and you loved him too."

"None better," replied Cian. "To him I owe everything. A poor wanderer I came to him, and he received me. To me he has given a clan, a home, a sister."

"And to me a brother," whispered Ciara, smiling up at him through her tears.

"Let us be faithful to his teaching, mindful always of the interests of our people and our country. My sister, you will help me to be a worthy chief to this people who have been given unto me."

"Yes, worthy as my father was," whispered Ciara, placing her hand in his.

And here as the shades of night close round them we bid them farewell. We have fared with Cian through the stormy years of his boyhood. True to his early promise he has been. In the years of his manhood we may be certain he was also true. And when later Cian asked the fair daughter of O'Riain if she were willing to enter an even closer, holier relationship with him than that of sister, we know that she placed her hands in his and whispered:

"Cian, it shall be as you wish. I know that it was the dream of my dear father."

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